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HOLYDAY TALKS

ROSH HASHANAH & YOM KIPPUR

COLLECTION OF DRASHAS FROM THE
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ROSH HASHANAH	3
1.1 Feeding Your Soul	4
1.2 Spiritual Vitality	9
1.3 Five Minutes A Day of Introspection	23
1.4 Getting Out Of Your Self	25
1.5 Mussar Vs. Chassidus	33
1.6 Nothing But The Truth	37
1.7 Preparing For Rosh HaShanah	45
1.8 Simanim Of Rosh HaShanah	58
1.9 Motivations In Prayer On Rosh HaShanah	64
1.10 The Avodah of Rosh HaShanah	72
1.11 A Mother Prepares for Rosh Hashanah	75
1.12 Meriting A Good Judgment	78
1.13 Praying For Others	83
1.15 Joy On Rosh HaShanah	101
1.16 "One Thing I Requested"	108
1.17 Avoiding Self-Absorption On Rosh HaShanah	116
1.18 The Choice	121
1.19 Malchiyos In Action	128
TEN DAYS OF REPENTENCE	132
2.1 How To Do Teshuvah	133
2.2 Inner Teshuvah	141
2.3 Ten Days of Seeking Hashem Himself	150

2.4 Getting to the Root of Sin	153
2.5 Forgiving Others	158
YOM KIPPUR	163
3.1 Finding Favor Again By Hashem	164
3.2 Yom Kippur – Disconnecting from the Pleasure of Sin	169
3.3 Yom Kippur – A Day of Purity	183
3.4 Returning To Your Inner Purity	193
3.5 Yom Kippur: Teshuvah and Beyond	201
3.6 Yom Kippur – Atonement	208
3.7 Leaving Behind Evil	215
3.8 The Five Steps of Te-sh-u-v-ah	218
3.9 The Growth of Yomim Noraim – Before and After	230



ROSH HASHANAH

1.1 | *Feeding Your Soul*¹

Our Body and Our Soul

The word “*Elul*” has the same *gematria* (numerical value in Hebrew) as the word “*chaim*” (life). This is a hint that in the Hebrew month of *Elul*, we can receive a new kind of life.

What do we mean when we ask for “life” on *Rosh HaShanah*, when we recite the words “*Zochreinu lechaim*”, “Remember us for life”? What is the kind of “life” we are asking for?

The Torah says² that Hashem breathed into man a “*nishmas chaim*”, a “breath of life”, the soul. All human beings have this *nishmas chaim*. Hashem gave us a *guf* (body) and a *neshamah* (Divine soul). The *guf* and the *neshamah* cannot survive independently of each other - we need both, in order to exist. However, we are much more aware of how to keep our body alive than how to revitalize our soul. We know that our body needs to eat in order to survive. And many *halachos* concern eating. For instance, though there is an obligation to eat on *Rosh HaShanah*, and we are not permitted to eat on Yom Kippur. Even Yom Kippur is linked to eating in a way because there is a *mitzvah* to eat on *Erev Yom Kippur*. Thus Torah requires us to feed our body, and in many cases it is a *mitzvah* to do so.

However, our souls also need to “eat”. How does our soul “eat”? On a basic level, our soul is fed from Torah and *mitzvos*.

The way we feed our body provides us with a clue as to how we can feed our soul. As it is written, “*From my flesh I see G-d.*”³ If a person isn’t physically hungry, he doesn’t have feel inclined to eat. Similarly, if a person does not feel his soul’s hunger, he may be less driven to “feed” his soul. In order for a person to be inspired to “feed” his soul, he usually needs to feel a certain **spiritual hunger**.

The Root Of The Problem

In order to experience Yom Kippur properly, we have to first identify the root of our problems. This is like when we go to a doctor [to fix a physical ailment and he focuses on the root cause of our illness, as opposed to perhaps superficially treating one symptom.] It may seem as if we have numerous, disparate problems, but in reality they all stem from the same root cause. We may have problems with our *middos*, with how we honor our parents, with our levels of *tzniyus* (modesty) - but

¹Adapted from sefer *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Yomim Noraim*, p.22
<http://www.bilvavi.net/english/drosbos-feeding-your-soul>

² Beraishis 2:7

³ Iyov 19:26

these problems are just the external symptoms, of our root problem. We need to identify and weed out the root of the problem: we do not feel the hunger of our *neshamah* !

We may do a lot of *chessed* and many acts of *mitzvos*, yet these actions are not necessarily stemming from the hunger of our *neshamah*. Actually, if we truly felt and identified our soul's hunger and satiated it sufficiently, we would not even need to go to any *shiurim* on spiritual growth !

When we are physically hungry, we are aware of our emptiness and respond to these signals by feeding our bodies. However, unfortunately we do not have spiritual 'antenna' in order to pick up our soul's hunger for spirituality. Consequently, we do not feed our souls properly.

As an example, how much of a "hunger" do we have to *daven*? Of course we *daven*, but the question is, do we feel a *hunger* for it? Similarly, if a person could identify in his soul his hunger to fulfill the *mitzvah* of honoring his parents, he would be pushed to fill his soul by carrying out this *mitzvah* with vigor. However, a person who does not sense his spiritual signals will not feel this hunger to honor parents, so he would not attempt to satiate it.

A Superficial Kind of Life

What are most people thinking about on *erev Yom Tov*? Though some people may consider the *ruchniyus* of the coming Yom Tov, most people are busy with more mundane matters. For instance, on *Erev Rosh Hashanah* many may be focused on simply the question of which honey in which to dip their apple! On *Erev Yom Kippur*, many people may focus on what are the best foods to eat and drink for an easy fast. And before Succos, many may focus simply on the fanciness of their *succah*. Before Chanukah, people talk about doughnuts. Before Purim, we care about the theme for their *Mishloach Manos*. Pesach preparations concern the physical cleanliness of the house or the *seder* preparations. On Shavuot and during the Nine Days, many simply seek out the best dairy recipes.

Yet, is this the way Jewish people should really be experiencing the festivals? Where is our *ruchniyus*? What about being happy to celebrate the Yom Tov itself? What about the deeper and true meaning of the festival?

Unfortunately, to many people Yom Tov is predominantly a day to catch up with family and friends. Though we are very aware and strive very hard to keep the physical aspects of the *mitzvos* for every Yom Tov, we may lack a hunger for *ruchniyus* ! In order to live properly as a Jew, we have to go beyond the superficial and reach this point of hunger for *ruchniyus*.

We are living in a superficial world, where our emphasis is often on our social life, our clothing and all outward behavior. We spend the vast proportion of each day gratifying our bodies rather than our souls. For instance, a woman can dress modestly and may not even be aware of the deep spirituality found in *tzniyus*. Although they are fulfilling the outer *mitzvah*, they aren't feeding their souls from it. A person can do *chessed* a whole day, but if one simply focuses on the physical acts of *chessed*, one fails to involve the soul and satiate it.

Hashem created us with a soul that needs to be fed as well. Particularly on Yom Tov we are supposed to live according to the precept “*No hunger for bread and no thirst for water, except to hear the word of Hashem.*”⁴ This is not just a prophecy for the End of Days, but rather a reference to ideal way to live as a Jew every day.

What do we feel when Rosh Hashanah passes? Do we yearn for Yom Kippur? Do we feel a hunger for it? What do we talk about as the next Yom Tov is approaching? Do we talk about *ruchniyus*, or do we presume that only people who learned *mussar* in Europe spoke about *ruchniyus*!?

Unfortunately, we do not include much *ruchniyus* in our daily conversations. When one person asks another, “How are you?” and the other person answers “*Baruch Hashem*”, both are usually referring to either their physical, financial or social wellbeing. They are rarely referring to their spiritual status.

However, in truth our main focus should be on our souls. When interacting with others, we need to speak about what is important, about soul matters. Reassuringly, we do not have to have achieved a very high spiritual level in order to interact in this way. Rather, we can all strive to simply spend at least a little of our day focusing on our souls. This small amount of attention may arouse our hunger for spirituality. Rather than dedicating the whole day or even half the day to *ruchniyus* matters, we should try to spend at least a small part of the day feeding the hunger of our souls.

Putting Our Heart Into Life

Many of us have become so used to living our life mechanically, thus we often miss what is truly important. A person needs to feel a hunger for *ruchniyus* and to be connected to achieving this true goal of satiating it. To achieve the ideal *Yiddishkeit*, we must put our hearts into all of our physical actions, into our Torah and *mitzvos* practice. The Sages state, “*Rachmana liba ba'i*”: Hashem wants the heart⁵. He does not only want our actions - He wants our hearts !

For instance, Avraham *Avinu* is epitomized by his *chessed*, but other people, even wicked people, also do *chessed*. Avraham’s *chessed* was different because he acted from his heart. He felt a hunger for *chessed*. Though we are not on the level of the *Avos* and *Imahos*, we can still strive to carry out all our deeds from our heart.

For the new year, we ask Hashem for life: “*Zochreinu lechaim*”. We are asking for a life in which we live for Hashem, not for ourselves. In order for us to have a good year, we need to stop and think about what we are missing in life. For two minutes a day, we can stop and think: “Who created me? What am I – a body or a soul? Am I in touch with my soul? Do I feel spiritual hunger? And do I feed this hunger, just as I feed the body?”

⁴ Amos 8:11

⁵ Sanhedrin 106b

Your Tefillah for Ruchniyus Is Always Answered

Hashem is always nearby a person. “Hashem is close, to all who call out to Him in truth.”⁶ But first, we need to call out to Him! Thus, once we realize that we lack a spiritual hunger, we can *daven* to Hashem for it. Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt”l* teaches that a person *davening* for physical matters is answered some of the time. However, a person *davening* for spirituality will always be answered!

We can beseech Hashem that He should remove our *lev even*, heart of stone, and give us instead a *lev basar*, a soft heart of flesh. As soon as we call out to Him, He will be right there for us. However, we must *daven* to Hashem from the depths of our heart and say: “Hashem, please, open my heart!”

Think About Your Life

We actually can have influence over whether or not we have a good year. It depends on the degree to which we turn to Hashem and ask. And this in turn depends on our souls’ hunger to feel Hashem and increase our spirituality. We must remember Hashem, who created us. Then we must *daven* to Him to feel a hunger for *ruchniyus*.

One of our main problems in this area is that we do not stop and think about this issue. We go through life without contemplating why we do what we do. But, as Chazal say, “If not now, when?”⁷

The first step to change is to realize and admit that we have a problem: that we do not feel hungry for spirituality. Then, we must *daven* to Hashem to help us open up our heart in order to feel and identify our hunger for spirituality. Just like parents cry to Hashem when they need a *shidduch* for their child, and the depth of their yearning fuels their *davening*, so too must we cry to Hashem to feel a hunger for *ruchniyus*.

My Main Message To You

We only have a hope of growing if we feel a hunger for spirituality (or else *daven* to Hashem for help in this regard). Even if we do a lot of *chessed* and *davens* with a lot of concentration, we cannot satiate ourselves spiritually if we do not even attend to our spiritual radar.

Every day, Hashem gives us the choice to talk to Hashem and beseech Him to really derive vitality and **live** through our *davening* and *mitzvos*. However, if we do not even realize what we are missing, we may *daven* our whole life and even concentrate on the words without satiating our spiritual hunger. We need to realize that we are able to talk to Hashem just like we can talk to a parent or friend. *Daven* to Hashem, and ask Him to give you the passion and *chiyus* (vitality) from *ruchniyus*, so that you merit a truly “good year”, of feeling truly alive.

⁶ *Tehillim* 145:18

⁷ *Avos* 1:14

1.2 | *Spiritual Vitality*⁸

A Meaningful Life

A man once made a list on Erev Rosh Hashanah. He listed all his needs for the upcoming year to ensure that he would not forget to beg Hashem for all his heart's desires. His list included *parnassah* (livelihood), health, well-raised children and other similar requests.

This man passed away three days after Rosh Hashanah.

How could this happen? All his requests were fulfilled. Health - he was not sick; *parnassah* - his family inherited; and his children were well-raised. Yet, he forgot to ask for one fundamental thing. He forgot to ask for life itself!

The first thing we all need to ask from Hashem is for life itself! Once we have been granted life, then we can ask for *parnassah*, health and other gifts to help us achieve our goals. But all these gifts are only useful and relevant if we first possess the greatest Divine gift –the gift of life itself.

For this reason we *daven* on Rosh Hashanah: "*Zochraynu L'chaim, Melech chofetz bachaim, v'chos-vaynu b'sefer hachaim l'maan'cha Elokim chaim.*" – “Remember us for **life**, King who desires **life**, and write us into the book of **life**, for Your sake, the living G-d.”

But what exactly do we mean when we ask for "*chaim*" (life)? Is it merely the opposite of “not dying”? Horses live, geese live. Yet, surely we are not merely asking from Hashem for the life of a goose or a horse? "Inscribe us in the Book of Life together with all the geese!" Obviously, this is not our intention. When we ask for life – we mean (or should mean!) that we want a **meaningful** life. *Davening* the words "*Kosvaynu b'sefer hachaim*" on Rosh Hashanah and "*Chosmaynu*" on Yom Kippur is *davening* for the [ideal] life of a human being.

There is also the question of where does this "inscribing" and "sealing" [for life] take place? Is there a big thick book somewhere in Heaven which records all our deeds? Obviously nothing is written down in a physical sense. Rather, this is a spiritual record. According to the Maggid of Mezeritch, the inscription and sealing [for life] take place in each person's **heart**. Our life-force resides in our heart - so death is when the heart ceases to function. When we pray to be inscribed for life, we are asking Hashem to write on the tablet of our **heart**.

In order to understand the depth hidden in those words, let us contemplate the previous year and what we want for the upcoming year.

⁸ Adapted from *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Yomim Noraim*, p.59
<http://www.bilvavi.net/english/rosh-hashannah-l-chayim-l-chayim>

A Life of “Chiyus” – To Have Real Vitality in our Life

Everything needs *chiyus*, spiritual vitality. *Chiyus* is the life-giving force that provides our life with meaning and sustenance. If someone does not have *chiyus*, he disintegrates, because there is no life source. Plants require irrigation. Animals need food and water. Though human beings also need food and water, their *chiyus* extends beyond mere food and water.

There are two categories of things that give us life - things that give us our **existence**⁹, and things that give us **pleasure**¹⁰. In order to exist, it would be enough to have "bread with salt and measured amounts of water". That will enable a person to physically live, that is, not to die. Yet, to really live with vitality, we also need pleasure in our life. This does not refer to merely having our physical needs met but rather to true pleasure.

When we come on Rosh Hashanah and ask Hashem to give us life, our first request, most external and basic, is simply for life itself. We ask that we should not die. In this concern, we are no different from animals and geese. Our second request, contained in this, is that we should get “*chiyus*” – vitality. In other words, when we come to request life on Rosh Hashanah, “*Kosvaynu L'chaim*”, we are requesting both types of life: Firstly, we want life in its simple meaning - that we should live a long life, and not be written in the opposite book, *chas v'shalom*; and for a “*chiyus*” in that “*chaim*” - as well as being allowed to live, we should have a *chiyus* in our life.

Some people are physically alive, but their life is a kind of death. Such people are living a life of internal *yissurim* (suffering), as in the verse, “*Ask for their soul to die*”.¹¹ Such people are living, but without *chiyus*. A person may be alive, yet he can still be devoid of any *chiyus*. For example, a wealthy individual may be accustomed to eating three meals every day- three types of cheese for breakfast, four types of meat for lunch, and an extravagant for supper. If he attempts to change immediately to eating bread with salt and measured amounts of water, his body will undergo physical madness.

Though the bread and water will physically sustain him, this nourishment alone will not enable him to survive. Why not? Because though the bare minimum will bring him a feeling of fullness and thus a degree of pleasure, to him it is not pleasure. Without meaningful pleasure in his life, a person is not really living.

The definition of “pleasure” is highly subjective. For instance, some people derive their pleasure from a certain type of food. Others may obtain their enjoyment from reading. Others derive their pleasure from a captivating *niggun* (Jewish melody), while someone on a higher level may obtain meaningful pleasure from Torah, mitzvos, and connection to the Creator of the world.

A man can sit by the *Gemara* an entire day – he is immersed in “*Toras Chaim*”, the “Torah of life.” Yet he himself may be kind of dead inside! Yes, he learns Torah, but not necessarily for the pleasure of it. He may be learning because he has no other choice or because he needs the income from the *kollel*. He may be learning because it would be more uncomfortable for him to leave than

⁹ *kiyum* (upkeep of existence)

¹⁰ *oneg shel chiyus* (pleasure that provides us with vitality)

¹¹ *Yonah 4:8*

to stay. He may be learning simply because he has nowhere else to go to. This type of learning has no *chiyus* and no pleasure attached.

This *chiyus* can also be divided into two categories – external pleasure, and internal pleasure. Some people derive pleasure from delicious food, honor, or a compliment; or various material pleasures of this world. These types of *chiyus* only feed the “animal” level of the soul¹² and are based on externalities.

Though some level of these external pleasures is part of a pleasant existence, we are not street people. We are *maaminim bnei maaminim* (believers, sons of believers). Thus, we should derive our meaningful pleasure from our **inner world** rather than from the external world of fleeting gratifications,

Let’s consider. A man arises in the morning, *davens Shacharis*, and goes to eat breakfast. What did he really enjoy more – *Shacharis*, or his breakfast? There is a fundamental distinction between an external source of pleasure and an internal source of this *chiyus*. After all, if he were exempt from *davening* due to a situation beyond his control, he wouldn’t have to *daven*. If he’s busy with a *mitzvah* that no one else besides him can, or if his wife gave birth and he took her to the hospital and he needs to attend to her there, in both cases, the *halachah* is that he is exempt from *davening*. One doesn’t have to *daven* in these situations, not due to forgetfulness and not *chas v’shalom* with malicious intent. Yet when it comes to eating breakfast, even if he is exempt from eating it, that exemption won’t do a thing, because he must eat in order to exist.

Often we only focus on external needs, asking Hashem to give him life in order that we do not die. We may also ask for other externalities such as *parnassah*, health, *shalom bayis*, and more spiritual concerns, such as that our children become *tzaddikim*. Each person asks according to his needs. However, all these needs are external. Where is the **internal** focus of the day? On Rosh Hashanah, we should *daven* and yearn for our *chiyus* to be predominantly the higher, more internal sort, which we can gain through learning Torah and keeping mitzvos.

Two Judgments on Rosh Hashanah

There are two days of Rosh Hashanah. The *sefarim hakedoshim* explains that the first day’s judgment concerns Hashem’s will for our *neshamah* (soul), whereas the second day’s judgment is concerned with our body’s needs.¹³

Why is it relevant for us to know when our *neshamah* is judged and when the body is judged? Whenever Hashem wants, let Him judge! The answer is because each day of Rosh Hashanah refers to a completely different form of life. Whereas the judgment on the second day refers simply to our physical existence, the judgment on the first day relates to the **internal** life the person will have for the year. The person is being judged as to how much internal *chiyus* he will have, how much

¹² the *nefesh habehaimis*

¹³ Cited in the name of the Arizal; refer to *sefer Avodas Yisrael (Mozhitz)* on Rosh Hashanah.

"*neshamah*" he will have for the coming year. We can use the month of Elul to improve our spiritual judgment on this day. Our *avodah* in Elul demonstrates to Hashem our yearning for a positive judgment on this first day of Rosh Hashanah.

But why is the first day of Rosh Hashanah so important?

Imagine a 90 year old man who receives a verdict of life on the second day of Rosh Hashanah. And yet, this same man may receive a death sentence on the first day. What will happen to him? He will not be eligible for the cemetery's guest list that year. However, he will only have physical existence but not more. In other words, he will be alive but his life will lack pleasure, without *chiyus*.

This phenomenon is not limited to the elderly. A person of any age can lack *chiyus*! Consider how many days each year that we feel we have no *chiyus*! We may *daven*, do *mitzvos*, immersing ourselves in Torah from morning until night, but our *chiyus* can be missing.

There is a verse in the Torah that says, "*V'chai bohem*" ("And you shall live by them.") A person whose *chiyus* is missing is someone who doesn't feel any pleasure. And particularly a person who is missing internal *chiyus* is missing meaningful pleasure.

For those of us privileged to receive life on Rosh Hashanah, we must analyze it. There are 24 hours in a day. Normally a person sleeps between 6 and 8 hours a day, during which he certainly wasn't feeling much *chiyus*. That leaves the other 14-16 hours of the day. With 14 to 16 hours each day in mind, one can make a *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting) for the previous year. In regard to the second day, he can make a *cheshbon hanefesh* which may include a list of tasks. For instance, he may ask himself whether he kept the *mitzvos* or, *chalilah* (Heaven forbid), did *aveiros*. He could examine his actions to see how they could be improved. Then he could do *teshuvah sheleimah* (complete repentance) - including *charatah* (regret), *viduy* (confession) and *kabalah l'assid* (resolving not to sin again), just like the Rambam says to do.

However, there is also a different *cheshbon hanefesh* relating to the first day. The *cheshbon hanefesh* of the first day of Rosh Hashanah is to figure how much time per day we experienced *chiyus*. Before we even evaluate where the *chiyus* came from, we must examine how much actual *chiyus* we derived from each activity we completed that day.

A person arises in the morning and runs to his daily activities. Maybe he goes to the *mikveh* and then he goes to *daven*. Did he derive *chiyus* from his *tefillah*? He should specify exactly how much of the *tefillah* gave him *chiyus*. He finishes *davening* and then attends to his various responsibilities. He may eat breakfast and learn at *kollel*. For each activity he must ask how much *chiyus* did he experience? He can apply this recording process for each activity of the day.

Thus, we have to make a double *cheshbon hanefesh* for ourselves. The first *cheshbon* relates to the second day of Rosh Hashanah and records our deeds. However, the deeper part of our *cheshbon hanefesh*, upon which Hashem's judgment on the first day is based, is to ask a question that is about life itself. How much *chiyus* did we experience throughout the day?

Of course, not all days are equal. On some days our *chiyus* is stronger than on other days. Upon honest reflection, a person may realize that on some days the greatest *chiyus* he experiences is the omelet he ate for breakfast, or when someone smiled at him. And that's it! He spent the rest of the day simply running all day long without feeling any internal *chiyus*.

In order to do a proper accounting, one must understand what "*chiyus*" is! Some people may feel perplexed about this concept of *chiyus*\vitality, to have meaningful pleasure. Neither sad nor happy, they are just fine with "living". But on deeper reflection, one will be able to know when one experiences *chiyus* in his life.

For instance, when his wife gave birth, he experienced intense happiness. This is "*chiyus*". Or a more subtle example- when he ate a delicious food he may have felt *chiyus*, each according to his own tastes and values. We all derive pleasure from something. We must check and identify what we "live" for, from what source do we derive our vitality. Once we work out where we derive our *chiyus* from, then we can evaluate how much time of each day did we experience this *chiyus*.

It is already an accomplishment if we find we experience more than ten minutes a day of *chiyus*.

To Feel that Torah Gives Us Life

How many people are really *zoche* to learn Torah and feel the pleasure every moment? Not merely the satisfaction of finishing the *sugya*¹⁴, though that is also essential. How many people are really *zocheh* to receiving the *chiyus* that Torah gives to those who learn it?

The Torah is "*Toras Chaim*", "a Torah of life" - it gives a person *chiyus*!

The Mishnah in *Avos* states, "How great the Torah is, that it gives life to those who learn it in this world and in the next world".¹⁵ There is a verse in the Torah, "*For they are life to those who find them, and a salve for all flesh.*" The Torah also says "*It can heal your flesh and nourish your bones.*" Thirdly, there is a verse that says "*For they will add on to your days and years of life, and peace and well-being*".

It's not sufficient just to just "know" that Torah gives life - we also need to be able to *feel* this truth.

Imagine the following scene. A person has a heart attack, *chas v'shalom*, and falls unconscious. The doctors resuscitate him. The success of the resuscitation procedure is not just theoretical information to be written in medical book. We saw that it really worked. One moment the person was lifeless, the next moment they were conscious again.

Chazal teach that Torah literally gives life to those who learn it. *Mitzvos* also give us life. *Tefillah* gives us life as well. The only question is whether we feel this truth within our **hearts**.

¹⁴ section of Gemara

¹⁵ *Avos* 6:7

This is the true meaning behind the Magid of Mezeritch's words quoted earlier. On Rosh Hashanah, the inscription and the seal take place on each person's **heart**. That is, the decree of how much *chiyus* a person will experience during the coming year is not only written in Heaven, it is revealed also within one's heart.

This *chiyus* is not some "*segulah*" whose reward will be felt at some time in the distant future. The Torah gives life to those who learn it and carry it out, right here in this world! A person who learns all his life long but does not taste the enjoyment of that Torah learning and practice is not experiencing *chiyus*. Though Hashem will give him his due reward, he is missing the current *chiyus*, the vitality from which he could be invigorated with at the time he is learning! This is not what Hashem wants for us.

When we receive a satisfying taste, a *chiyus* from Torah, we are able to learn even when we inevitably temporarily lose our enjoyment. To learn our entire life only in order to receive a graduation certificate (*semichah*) or other reasons, but without experiencing pleasure from learning is suffering. It is death, not life! We may be fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *Talmud Torah* and will receive due reward for it, but are missing out on the real pleasure of life!

You only get what you ask for!

People commonly focus only on the judgment of the second day of Rosh Hashanah without contemplating the judgment and focus of the first day.

Many of us may make a *cheshbon hanefesh* of what actions - *mitzvos* and *aveiros* - that we did the previous year. We may make an inventory of our failures – for instance, in guarding our eyes, *lashon hora*, embarrassing someone, wasting time set aside for Torah learning, *davening* too late. And we may make a *cheshbon hanefesh* of goals to rectify in these areas for the coming year. But this plan alone is destined to fail. Why?

Every year we make *kaballo*s (resolutions) but most of the time we cannot carry these out the entire year. Why not? Do our *kaballo*s lack intention? Are we not serious? But we are serious! So what is the problem?

Have you ever seen a dead body that can get up on time for *Shacharis*? Of course not! So too a person cannot consistently maintain the will and energy needed to complete [those certain *mitzvos* that are more difficult for us] without *chiyus*. For instance, we may not manage to win the battle and rise early every morning to get up on time if not for the pleasure of *chiyus*. With a strong resolution we may be able to persevere for a little while, perhaps even all the way to *Hoshanah Rabbah*. But beyond that, is there little real chance of any *kaballo*s sticking without *chiyus*!

When a person makes a *cheshbon hanefesh* of his deeds of the previous year and goals for the coming year, he is already decreeing his own *gzar din* (year's decree) for the second day. He may do real *teshuvah* concerning his *maasim* (deeds). Hashem may accept his *teshuvah* and will give him physical life on the second day. However, without assessing his level of *chiyus* in his *mitzvos* and

Torah learning, he has not accounted for his *neshamah*. Thus, he has not done *teshuvah* on it. Without having done *teshuvah* to receive more *chiyus* in certain areas, how could he possibly receive more *chiyus* for the upcoming year?!

In order to receive *chiyus*, we need to ask Hashem for it, just like we ask for everything else we desire. This can be compared to someone who asks the king to give him precious stones and a house. If this person doesn't specifically request a car, he will not receive one. Similarly, if a person comes on Rosh Hashanah and asks for health, *parnassah*, or whatever his list of requests may be, but he neglects to ask for *chiyus*, he will not receive *chiyus*!

A person may ask for a good memory for learning, but if he neglects to ask for *chiyus*, his memory will serve him like a camera, a computer disc without providing any meaningful pleasure. Though a computer may remember information better than any human being, it is still an inanimate object, not a living thing. The fact that we remember things does not change a person into a living being.

Only a person who knows and has experienced the joy and meaning of Torah learning can supersede a computer in his learning. Though this difference may seem simple, often we become preoccupied more with knowing and keeping the Torah and *mitzvos* and forget about the *chiyus* our actions can give us.

It's actually impossible to keep all of the Torah and *mitzvos* according to *halachah* without *chiyus*. To do any *mitzvos* without *chiyus* involves a battle – and as human beings we cannot sustain such a fight the whole year long. We may sustain it for a short period, perhaps ten days or so. Certainly, we do not have the effort to achieve difficult challenges without *chiyus* the entire year.

How then can we succeed in achieving our resolutions for the entire year?

Let's consider marriage. A *chosson* does not need to be dragged to his own *chuppah*. If this were the case, the marriage would be destined to fail. However, a *chosson* who expects and gains pleasure from the idea of sharing his life in marriage and is happy with the notion will have the fortitude to continue later during the inevitable challenges. The pleasurable expectations and joy he experiences is his *chiyus*. This *chiyus* helps him to weather the inevitable challenges.

Similarly, the *chiyus* we obtain from learning Torah and doing *mitzvos* give us the power to handle the challenges in our service of Hashem. This is the way to have a healthy world, a good world.

Why would a person who does not gain any joy from *davening* be motivated to *daven* in the morning? Of course, he believes that Hashem has commanded him to say Shema on time as written in the holy Torah. He believes that whoever does not do this *mitzvah* will go to *Gehinnom* and he is motivated to do the commandments to avoid this fate. Admittedly, we do need to rely on fear of *Gehinnom* at times. It's not acceptable to only do the *mitzvos* whenever we feel like it. However, we are not capable of carrying out those *mitzvos* that we find difficult for an entire year solely on the basis of a fear of *Gehinnom*.

In contrast, a person who has experienced the taste of the *chiyus* available through *tefillah* will manage to achieve a consistent *davening* service to Hashem. This taste of *chiyus* will sustain him even if there are days when he lacks the *cheishbek* (desire) and thus needs to awaken his fear of *Gehinnom* to get out of bed.

Other people may appear to achieve consistency in their *mitzvah* performance, yet their service is out of rote, or due to a nature that thrives on structure rather than due to *chiyus*. *L'havdil*, such people may arise at the same time every morning and arrive punctually at work, and yet this has no connection to Torah and *mitzvos*. Their actions are merely a reflection of their structured nature. The regularity of their *davening* does not guarantee that they receive any *taam* at all in their *tefillah*.

More Internal Chiyus, Less External Chiyus required

Let's stop and think a moment about a regular day.

When we go about our regular morning routine - for instance *davening*, putting on *tefillin*, and learning Torah - how much *chiyus* is in this practice? When we walk down the street, how much *chiyus* do other people seem to have? We go into the *beis midrash*, how many happy people do you see? It seems that there are very few people who are truly happy.

How can this be?? How can it be that we may be *zocheh* to learn the Torah of Hashem for seven or eight hours but without joy? If we truly believe that the main purpose of our life is Talmud Torah that brings us to good deeds, then why would a person who is *zocheh* to dedicate most of his day to learning Torah not be happy? It makes no sense!

This issue is not a rational one, but a problem relating to the heart's true desires. Though a person knows in his head that there is a Creator, He gave us the Torah, and the existence of the entire world depends on Torah and *mitzvos*, the heart of a person may desire other things. A person cannot derive any *chiyus* from the mere knowledge that Torah and *mitzvos* sustain us, until the clarity of this knowledge is brought into his heart.

A person needs *chiyus*. He cannot really "live" without it. Thus, if he does not obtain *chiyus* in his heart from learning Torah, he therefore seeks it from other sources. He may receive this *chiyus* from eating delicacies, reading books, or other external sources. As it is impossible to live without feeling *chiyus*, he seeks a lower, transitory version of pleasure derived merely from externalities. Without receiving true, internal *chiyus* from Torah, from *mitzvos*, from *tefillah*, from *emunah* and from his relationship with the Creator, one settles for a counterfeit type of *chiyus* from some other place.

It is possible that a person may keep all the *mitzvos* and *davens*, and yet obtains his *chiyus* from the same sources as a secular person. Though his actions are proper, on his inside, he obtains his joy from outside sources. Such a person may finish *davening* or his learning session and then feel lifeless and empty afterwards. He may seek *chiyus* during his lunch break from a cup of coffee, a cigarette, and his gadgets. He is really seeking a source of *chiyus*.

When a person enjoys eating physical food, he obtains *chiyus*. The good, energizing feeling needs no explanation. Two-year olds seek sweets without being told that they are tasty. They experience the sweet taste themselves. When a person with internal *chiyus* learns Torah, at the end of first *sefer* he feels good about himself. The Torah gave him life because he has a *neshamah* within him, and the *neshamah* has been invigorated by toiling over Torah. He was *zocheh* to learn, to understand, to attach himself to the Torah in the depth of his soul, and this energizes him. When he is out in the street, he has no need to satisfy his eyes by looking at other things because he has *chiyus inside*.

In summary, those who are energized by internal *chiyus* do not need to turn to outside sources. In contrast, those without internal *chiyus* will naturally seek pleasure from external sources.

Chiyus First - Then Kabballos!

Throughout the year we need to handle many challenges. Though making more *kaballos* is necessary; it should not be our first step. First, one must be energized and spiritually watered.

Imagine a sick person whose doctor prescribes for him to take three pills a day. The man returns home and stops eating and drinking. His family urges him to eat and drink. They tell him that if he carries on like this, in a few days he will die! “But I don’t understand,” he complains. “Didn’t the doctor tell me just to take three pills every day?”

Yes, the man needs to take the three pills each day for his health. But before this, he needs to eat and drink in order to stay alive. And eating and drinking are a necessary and fundamental precondition for life which must come before any healing process. Though we each have problems that require ‘pills’ to heal, first and foremost we need to eat the “bread” of Torah and “drink” its water and its wine. Being nourished by internal *chiyus* gives us the proper spiritual diet, analogous to physical food. Only after we are spiritually nourished will we have life and energy from which to grow and find solutions to our problems like *kaballos*. But without eating and drinking our spiritual nourishment, taking medicine in the form of *kaballos* will be useless.

Most people have a deep desire to improve in the coming year. However, desire alone is useless. For example, if a man wants to be *mezakeh es harabim* (beneficial to the public), he might get a good idea that in order for every Jew throughout the world to say *Tehillim*, he will publish and distribute 6 million *sifrei Tehillim*. However, since each *sefer Tehillim* costs 10 shekel, in order to put his good intention into practice he needs 60 million shekel. He does not have this money. Though his intention and desire are strong, and despite pouring out his heart before the *Borei olam* to be *mezakeh* him, he lacks the 60 million shekel at his disposal which are vital for his plans to work in practice. Similarly, we may have a strong and pure desire to correct our flaws or sins, but if we lack a source of *chiyus*, how will we accomplish anything with our resolutions?!

Each of us has different areas to improve. One may work on *tzniyus* (modesty), another on internet issues, a third on *shemiras halashon* (guarding our speech). Though improving ourselves in

these areas is vital and admirable, the primary question is why we are committing these *aveiros* in the first place. If we do not fix the source of why we sin, any desire for improvement will be fruitless.

It may be tempting to write off these challenges by blaming it on the generation, or on the strength of the *yetzer hara*, and claiming that we are helpless. Admittedly, our generation is facing intense challenges. But what is the root of the problem? The root of the problem is a lack of internal *chiyus* which cause people to seek gratification elsewhere.

“*Batallah* (boredom) leads to insanity.”¹⁶ What is meant by “*batallah*”? Boredom does not mean lack of activity. A person can sit in a *beis midrash* all day and learn, and not waste a moment and yet essentially he is asleep! This is “boredom” - no *chiyus*, no passion or vitality in his learning! His brain may be working and he might understand the material very well. He may even exert himself. But his **heart** is disconnected from his learning. This emptiness may encourage him to search elsewhere for some kind of fulfillment. He is thus susceptible from temptations from external sources.

The Rambam writes: “A person only thinks a lot about immoral relations if his **heart** is empty of wisdom.”¹⁷ In contrast, a **heart** that is filled with wisdom of Torah would find the Torah to be a “*Toras Chaim*” to him. He would feel satisfied, rewarded and satiated from his *ruchniyus*. In turn, he would be much less likely to look for things outside. To illustrate, people with problems in their home look for fulfillment outside of it. By contrast, a person who lives in a good home will quite naturally be less drawn toward temptations pulling him from outside.

Those who derive *chiyus* from a day of toiling in Torah and keeping the *mitzvos*, *davening*, *emunah* and connection with the Creator of the world are the ones who feel truly alive. They have an inner zeal and vitality driving them and thus they do not need to look outside for *chiyus*. A person searches for external sources of vitality only when he feels empty inside. This drive to fill the emptiness will lead him to have less self-control to reject improper enticements he encounters.

Thus, the natural order of making resolutions is to first develop a source of *chiyus* within ourselves. Only then we can take corrective action and make any specific *kabbollos*. This does mean we should not *daven* for our needs, of course. But **first** we should ask and focus on obtaining *chiyus* from holiness. Regardless of how many holy *maasim* we do, obtaining the maximum *chiyus* from holiness should be our first step.

The first thing we should therefore *daven* for on Rosh Hashanah is “*Zochraynu l'chaim*,” - that we should have *chiyus* in our life! How many people live without *chiyus*! How much *chiyus* is there within each one of us? We need to request and to plead: “*Ribono shel olam*, Give me more *chiyus* in my life, allow me to feel internal *chiyus* within myself.”

After one has requested for this internal *chiyus*, we can then ask for *parmassah*, health, or other personal needs. The preparation for Rosh Hashanah needs to begin with the reflection on how much *chiyus* we had in our life last year, and the source of this *chiyus*. We may be surprised when we discover the true source of our personal vitality in our lives....

¹⁶ *Kesubos 59b*

¹⁷ *Rambam: Hilchos Issurei Biah 22:21*

Only when we have been completely honest about what we are deriving vitality from can we come and plead honestly before Hashem. “*Zochraynu l'chaim*” - which kind of “*chaim*” (life)? The “*chaim*” of “*L'maan'cha Elokim Chaim*”, the kind of *chaim* that our *chiyus* will be in serving the Creator. The “*chaim*” that means to finish off our sessions of learning Torah with the feeling in one's heart of being “alive.” We should seek the type of “*chaim*” that means to leave *shul* after finishing *Shacharis* with the feeling of an inner satisfaction, the meaning and joy that results from a true connection with Hashem.

When we perform *tefillah* and Torah learning with *chiyus*, then from that root of *chiyus*, we then have the ability to correct all our actions and mistakes from a place of strength.

What's Left – Only Torah and Maasim Tovim

In *Olam HaBa* (the World to Come), there are no actions. The World To Come is free of doing *mitzvos*. When the *neshamah* goes up to Gan Eden, there is no *tallis*, no *succah*, and no *shofar*. What then exactly is the life of *Olam HaBa*?

Life in the Next World is made up of these points of *chiyus* that a person experienced here in *Olam HaZeh* (This World)! The *chiyus* that a person receives from his learning Torah, doing *mitzvos*, from *tefillah*, from *emunah*, from connection with the Creator, is eternal. Chazal state that “When a person leaves the world, nothing accompanies him, not money and not gold and not precious stones, only Torah and his good deeds.”¹⁸

What does it mean that the *chiyus* of “Torah and good deeds” is eternal? The actual physical *mitzvos* will be long gone from the world. The *succah* that he sat in will not accompany him to the Next World - it has been disassembled. The *esrog* has disintegrated. Obviously, the physical aspects of doing the *mitzvos* are not permanent, because the objects of the *mitzvah* are no longer in existence. The eternal part of these *mitzvos* that remains, then, is the impression on the person's heart - the *chiyus* in his *neshamah* (Divine soul) that he obtained from doing these physical commandments.

The Torah is “*Toras Chaim*”, and the *mitzvos* are *mitzvos* that provide us with true *chaim*, life. The “*chaim*” here refers to the aftertaste, the attitude, and the joy in the soul which remains permanently after a person has completed the physical learning or *mitzvah* itself.

We may presume that Torah learning is more permanent because even after hearing a Torah *shiur*, we remember what we learned. And yet, remembering our Torah learning is only the outer part of the Torah we learned. The internal part is the “*Toras Chaim*”, the *chiyus* from holiness that is embedded within the Torah.

¹⁸ *Avos* 6:9

After a day of learning Torah and doing *mitzvos*, we can contemplate not just what we put into it, but what we got out of it. How much *chiyus* did we have today? That's the measure of eternal pleasure.

Nourished by our Torah Learning

The following words of the *Gemara* are well-known: “Three books are opened on Rosh Hashanah, one for the completely wicked, one for the completely righteous, and one for the *beinonim* (average). The righteous are written and sealed immediately for life, the wicked are written and sealed immediately for death, while the *beinonim* are held in suspension from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur. If they are *zoche*, they are written for life. Otherwise they are written for death”.¹⁹

Tosafos (Rosh Hashanah 16b) asks: Don't we see each year many wicked people who continue living, and many righteous people who die during the year? *Tosafos* answers that “What here is called death for the wicked and life for righteous refers to the life of *Olam HaBa* (the Next World).”

If death and life refer to life only in *Olam HaBa*, then why not merely judge the person in the future, when the Great Day of Judgment for *Olam HaBa* arrives? Why is there a book of judgment open each year if the life and death experienced is only relevant to *Olam HaBa*?

The answer is that in *Olam HaBa*, there is no outer life, only inner life. *Tosafos'* reference to people experiencing life and death in *Olam HaBa* doesn't refer to what will happen to him in the future *Olam HaBa*, but rather relates to how much *chiyus*, the eternal joy that he will experience in this world, which then makes up *Olam HaBa* in the future.

This can also be explained in another way. Imagine that on Rosh Hashanah it is decreed that a man will be granted another 356 days of life, but it is also decreed that he will be granted only 15 minutes of life. These two decrees appear contradictory. However, each refers to a different kind of life. It is decreed that he will live physically for the entire year, and yet he will only experience 15 minutes of *chiyus* during that entire year. He will only experience 15 minutes of spiritual elation. Once he has expended this 15 minutes of *chiyus*, he is essentially dead inside and will have no more internal *chiyus* until the following year. In other words, just because we physically survive another year, does not mean we truly have “lived” the whole year!

When *davening* and making our lists, we often tend to focus on quantity – more *parnassah*, better health, more children etc. Yet, as well as asking for more, we should be focusing on quality of life - inner quality in our *nefesh* (soul and spiritual needs), namely, the extent to which we feel alive inside.

Though there may not appear to be a distinction from the outside, in essence, there can be a huge difference between those who have *chiyus* and those who do not. Imagine two people who learn *Gemara* intensely for four hours. They may both invest their whole mind in understanding the *sugya*. However, their experiences were fundamentally different. One man studied with *chiyus* and was thus

¹⁹ *Rosh Hashanah 16b*

“alive” for the entire four hours. In contrast, the second man did not have much *chiyus* and was thus only alive for a minute or two. This is because on the previous Rosh Hashanah it was decreed that the first man would receive four hours of *chiyus*, whereas the second man was only rewarded with a couple of minutes of learning with *chiyus*.

If we want more *chiyus*, we have to ask for it! We ask to be *zoche* to learn Torah, we ask to know Torah, but we need to ask to be *zoche* that the Torah will be the kind of learning that is “*ki heim chayeynu*”, where we realize that it’s our life and that we feel alive from it. We need to ask that we will be invigorated and stimulated from our learning, that Torah will be the primary source of our nourishment and that we feel energized and joyful from this nourishment.

It may be difficult to find someone who can honestly say he had a completely happy year. One might complain that he did not feel happy because of his challenges – a medical problem with one of his children, a loss of *parnassah*, accumulated debts, etc.” We may erroneously assume that these various issues are the reason people are not happy. But the true reason why people do not feel happy, content and complete is because they are missing a source of *chiyus*. When a person has no internal, meaningful pleasure to nourish his *neshamah*, he will feel and suffer from the full impact of his various problems.

A person who experiences *chiyus* all day long sees life through a different lens. Though he obviously still deals with suffering and challenges, they are less likely to cause him despair. A person who obtains *chiyus* from Torah and *mitzvos* is energized by his *chiyus* so that his problems, though painful and unpleasant, will not destroy his life or sap out its joy and meaning.

Knowing the Reality, Not Just an Idea

The above is not merely a “*shmuez*” that is meant for *hisorerus* (inspiration) or *mussar* (ethics), or an idea. It is simply reality!

Our problems and challenges and experiences are also reality. Unlike children, we are aware that we will face difficulties and challenges each year in *Olam HaZeh*. We understand also that next year is not just something written on a calendar. The coming year is an entire *masechta* (tractate) that each one of us will experience. Each of us does not know what the future holds. But coming into the new year, we can ask Hashem for things and thereby affect our reality.

No one in this world is given everything he desires. Consider the lives of the *Avos*. The *Avos* surely did not have all their wishes and prayers answered. Did they all have abundant health, plenty of livelihood, great marital peace, and good well-raised children? Avraham Avinu had no children for 100 years. Undoubtedly, each year he *davened* for a child, but he was not answered for 100 years. Yitzchak and Rivkah also remained childless for many years. Their requests on Rosh Hashanah were denied numerous times. Yaakov had nothing to eat and then mourned over the loss of Yosef for 22 years and surely he requested Hashem for *parnassah*.

Certainly it was hard for them. So, how did our *Avos* feel complete and happy in this world despite their difficulties? They had *chiyus* in their hearts! Despite being barren, or suffering a lack of *parnasah*, they had *chiyus*, an inner source of well of pleasure and meaning from which to draw vitality, strength and energy.

With *chiyus*, even if *chas v'shalom* a truly difficult and very unpleasant tragedy were to occur, something for which a person genuinely needs strong *emunah*, a person has the coping mechanisms and strength to endure the pain and rise.

For instance, like Yaakov Avinu did, some people tragically endure the pain of losing a child. They may feel bereft, lonely and despairing. This is because they experience this terrible tragedy in their life without an accompanying source of *chiyus* to balance out the pain and give it meaning. Without *chiyus*, it may feel impossible to cope with such a tragedy, but with *chiyus* they can find the inner strength to bear the pain without suffering.

After all, we all lack something in our lives. Ever since Adam and Chava ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, there has been hardship and pain. Only when *Moshiach* comes will there be abundance of everything for everybody.

Instead of asking for the impossible – to never lack anything - we can ask Hashem to grant us *chiyus* throughout the year so that our *neshamah* will be open and we will feel alive inside. This *chiyus* will then give us the strength to deal with all our inevitable challenges. Hashem will give us exactly the amount of inner strength and vitality to cope with everything He sends us, if only we ask for it.

So when approaching Rosh Hashanah of the coming year, the first thing we need to ask for is for *chiyus* in our lives. When we say “*Kosvaynu l'chaim*”, we really should be asking Hashem for a life with *chiyus*, the inner vitality that makes us feel alive inside ourselves.

May we all be *zoche* to recognize that true life is the nourishment of the *neshamah*, a life of feeling connected to the Creator of the world. May Hashem writing us in the “*sefer hachaim, lmaan'cha Elokim, chaim*” and may we be *zoche* to uncover our inner joy and meaning, our *chiyus* in this world.

1.3 | *Five Minutes A Day of Introspection*²⁰

Caught Up in Pre-Yom Tov Stress

In Navi (the books of the Prophets), we learn about Jerusalem and the great people that lived here.

We are now between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. What is our current day situation? We are in the center of Jerusalem. How is Jerusalem supposed to look? What should the streets look like?

Everyone is buying *s'chach* and walls for their succah. We are all looking to beautify our succah. What about our souls? Are we looking to beautify our souls?

Are we running to put together our succah because it is a *mitzvah*, or because that's what everyone else is doing?

When we walk in the street today, do we feel that it is almost *Yom Kippur*? We are caught up in life. Our souls and our *Yiddishkeit* is missing. Non-Jews also fill their streets with holiday shopping when it comes to their holidays. What is the difference then between us and them?? We are just being caught up in the upcoming Yom Tov, and our *Yiddishkeit* is missing.

The entire way we live our life is lacking any direction. We are just going through motions. Yom Tov to us is just a hectic time full of running around and shopping. We do not feel in the streets that *Yom Kippur* is any day now. The streets are simply full of pre-Yom Tov stress.

Stop and Think

We have to be connected to the purpose that we came down onto this world for. Everyone – without exception – should stop once a day and think for a few minutes: “Who am I? Why did I come onto this world?”

You can't do this when you are on the bus or while you're talking to your friends. You need to be alone and think: “What is my life about? And why did we come onto this world?”

We didn't come on to this world for our friends. Of course we need friends, but that is not why we came onto this world.

²⁰ Adapted from a derashah given to women during Elul. Note: This is only a summary; the complete version of this shiur appears in *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Yomim Noraim*, p.49
<http://www.bilvavi.net/english/womans-world-02-five-minutes-day>

Our Purpose on this World

We have one purpose on the world – only one: To be close to Hashem. Whatever we do in our life are the tools we need to get close to Him. Rosh Hashanah, *Yom Kippur*, Succos, Yom Tov and our friends are all tools that help us get there, but they are not the ultimate goal. Our ultimate goal is to get close to Hashem.

Someone came to me once with a problem that he cannot control his eating habits. He loves food and eats too much. He asked me what he can do about this. I told him, “Before you eat something, think: “Will this bring me closer to Hashem – or further?”

Every day for a few minutes, think: “I came onto this world for a purpose.” We all know this, but because we are so caught up in life we forget it.

When you get up in the morning, think: “Why am I getting out of bed in the morning?” Your soul returned to you after a night’s sleep; others do not wake up sometimes. Why did Hashem return your soul to you? For what purpose?

Ask a teenager: What do you want? A boy will say, “To learn good.” A girl might say, “To be popular and have lots of friends.” When they get older they say, “To get a good *shidduch*.” But none of them are thinking what they really want out of life. No one is thinking why they even came onto this world!

In *Navi*, we learn about great people like Yechezkel HaNavi, Dovid HaMelech and Shaul HaMelech. Is there anyone here who thinks that any of these *tzaddikim* would want to walk down modern day Jerusalem, even in the most *chareidi* neighborhoods? The streets are full of restaurants and shopping centers. There is nothing wrong with eating food or buying clothes, but the streets of Jerusalem do not look the way they are supposed to! We are missing the truth.

Just think for a few minutes a day what your purpose is on this world. This advice is not from me – it is from the Ramchal in *sefer Derech Etz Chaim*.

We Ask for “Life”

Hashem gave us life. On *Rosh Hashanah* we ask, “Remember us for life.” But what is the **life** we want...?

It is impossible to change our life in one day. But this we can do – once a day, let us stop for a few minutes and think why we are living, what our purpose is.

I hope you listened to these words. These are not ideas – these words are practical guidance for life. If we do this, everything will change, because this is the root of all that we need to do. If we do this every day, we will see improvement in all areas!

1.4 | *Getting Out Of Your Self*

The Hint of the Shofar

On *Rosh HaShanah*, we have a *mitzvah* to blow *shofar*. A *shofar* is designed in a way that one side of its opening is narrow, and the other opening is wide. The sound of the *shofar* comes out from a narrow opening, but it is heard on the wide end of the opening.

The *Gemara* states that the sound of the *shofar* sounds like someone crying. That is why we blow different sounds that resemble crying (*shevarim* and *teruah*). These are two kinds of crying that a person exhibits. When does a person cry? When he is in pain. When a person feels confined by something, and he wants Hashem to release him from his confined state, he blows (and hears) the *shofar* in order to come out of his “confines” and reveal instead an “expansion”.

The purpose of the *shofar* is not just the sounds that come out from it. The *shofar* is an expression of our soul’s mission during these days: “*Shapru maaseichem*”, “Beautify your deeds.” The Rambam²¹ writes that the *shofar* comes to awaken those who are slumbering.

The *shofar* is narrow in the place where the sound comes from, and it is wide in the opening that the sound escapes from. This reflects what a person’s *Avodah* is during these days: to come out of his “narrowness” and expand from his “confines”. What do we mean by this?

In the physical world, we can understand well what a confine is and what an expansion is. When a person’s monthly income isn’t enough to cover his expenses, this feels like he is confined. When he has adequate livelihood, *Baruch Hashem*, he feels widened from his confines. A person wants to escape the confines of having to live so frugally and instead to live comfortably, without having to worry so much about every penny he spends. People like to be free from any confines.

The lesson of the *shofar*, though, is not just about escaping your confines when it comes to the physical. It is a lesson about escaping confines *within our own soul*, and it is upon us to understand how we can leave our “confines”.

There are many ways how we leave our confines, and we will try to go through each of them.

Leaving Your Narrowed State

Every person worries for himself. There is no such person who can say about himself that he doesn’t worry about himself. On the other hand, every person also has some caring for others. There is no person who only cares for himself his entire life and never worried about another person.

²¹ Rambam *Hilchos Teshuvah* 3:4

The higher level a person is on, the less he worries for himself, and the more he worries for others. The less of a level he is on, the more self-absorbed he is, and he is less worried for others.

To come out of your “confines” means to come out of your narrowness and instead expand beyond yourself. A person has to leave his private little life and look at the world with a widened view, thinking: “There is such thing as the Jewish people, and there are 600,000 souls who are one collective essence. My existence is only one out of these 600,000.”

When a person leaves his self-absorption in this way, it’s like experiencing redemption in his own soul.

Rosh HaShanah is the Day of Judgment. Hashem writes for each person on this day how much income he will make this year, what his health will be like, and all the rest of his needs. We want to have comfort in all these areas. But if we want to take care of our body’s needs, we need to understand that it depends on a healthy soul. If our soul is stuck in a narrow confine, this narrowness will also manifest itself in our body. So if a person wants to be comfortable, he has to make sure his soul is comfortable – in other words, he has to make sure that his soul is not stuck in a narrow confine. If a person succeeds in that, his body’s needs will be affected as well by this, and he will have all his physical comforts.

A person expands beyond himself starting by expanding his internal world, and this slowly spreads outward onto his physical body.

A husband and wife can live together in a house, but it can be like a narrow confine – when each of them is living for themselves. If a person only thinks about himself and only worries for himself, that is a confine. When a person understands and feels that there is another person living with him in his house, and he is involved with giving to that other person – he has left the narrow confines.

A person comes to *Rosh HaShanah*, the Day of Judgment. He is thinking about himself and he wants to merit a good judgment. Is he only preparing with himself for *Rosh HaShanah*, or is he thinking about others too, about how he can help them come properly into the Yom Tov? Is he concerned for anyone either for their physical needs or their spiritual needs?

If a person comes to *Rosh HaShanah* only thinking about himself, he has basically already signed for himself his decree....

“Every person signs with his hand on it.” Every person seals his fate on this day. How do you seal your own decree? Aren’t we on this physical world, while the decree is being made in Heaven? Don’t we need to ascend to Heaven to sign a decree?

The simple answer to this is that our soul goes to Heaven at night when we sleep, and then it signs the decree. But the depth of this matter is as the Maggid of Mezritch *z”l* explained: the way a person lives is what signs the decree. Everyone signs his own decree! How? If a person has left his “confines” and he has expanded beyond himself, he has signed for himself a decree that he has left his confines. If a person still remains in his own personal confines, it is as if he never heard the *shofar*, from an inner perspective.

If a person blows *shofar* and one of the openings is closed, he hasn't fulfilled his obligation of *shofar*. The *mitzvah* is only fulfilled when you blow from the narrow opening and it comes out of the wide opening. In terms of our own soul, we need to come out of our narrowness and expand beyond ourselves.

But if a person comes to *Rosh HaShanah* and he only thinks about himself, from an inner perspective, he has not performed the purpose of the *mitzvah*.

There is a well-known story that Reb Yisrael Salanter was walking on the street on Erev *Yom Kippur*, when a certain pious individual walked by him. Reb Yisrael Salanter gave him a blessing, but the person looked so serious about the *Yom HaDin* that he failed to respond "*Shalom*." Reb Yisrael Salanter remarked about this, "This is not righteousness. True righteousness is when a person leaves his confines and expands beyond himself, and he isn't self-absorbed and only worrying for his private life. If it is Erev *Yom Kippur* and he is so absorbed in himself that he can't greet me with a *Shalom Aleichem*, he is missing the whole point."

Every person signs his own decree. The narrower a person is, the narrower his income, health and happiness will be. The more a person expands beyond himself, the wider his blessings will be – he will widen his life, his marriage, his income and all other areas.

Inner Redemption by Nullifying Your Private Life

How can a person expand beyond himself? He has to realize that there is no such thing as a "private" life.

Reb Zusha of Anipoli *zt"l* merited to see Eliyahu HaNavi, who told him the following: *Chazal* state that *Moshiach* will not come until all the *peratios* (coins) from every wallet will be used up. *Peratios* can also mean "private." The real depth behind why *Moshiach* hasn't come yet is because every person is worrying only for himself!

People will for sure react with a question: "Is this the only reason that *Moshiach* hasn't come yet?! He hasn't come because there are still many people who aren't keeping *mitzvos*, and even those who fulfill the *mitzvos* aren't doing so perfectly. We can make a long list of all the problems in this generation."

But if a person wouldn't be thinking only of himself, he would be serving Hashem perfectly.

A person commits a sin not because he wants to do something good for others, but because he only cared for himself at the moment. He cheated in business to make a good deal – why? He only cared about himself at the moment. He might pat himself on the back that he gives *maaser* up until a fifth of his money, and he might even give half of his money to *tzedakah*, but that still doesn't erase his sin of stealing. The reason why he sinned was because he only worried for himself and thus he wanted some pleasure.

If a person erases his private life, he wouldn't come to commit a sin. A person only sins because his *yetzer hora* convinced him that it will be good for him to do so. In other words: "Just worry about yourself...."

It seems simply that to get rid of our private life means to have a positive attitude toward others and to give more *tzedakah*, but really, it means much more than that.

If a person reflects about his life in a true and deep way, he will conclude with absolute, simple clarity: **The root of all problems is when a person only thinks and worries about himself.** Sometimes a person isn't necessarily having a forbidden thought, but sometimes a person commits a sin simply because all he thought about was himself.

The *Nefesh HaChaim* writes in the introduction: "A person was not created except to help others." If that would be a person's perspective in whatever he does, he would ask himself each time: Is what I'm doing now for myself, or in order to help others?

When a person eats something with a questionable *hechsher* (a kosher certification), what is the real reason that he did so? If he thinks about it a little, he will discover that it was because he only worried about himself at the time.

Donating Some of Your Learning

If we would succeed in uprooting our self-absorption, we wouldn't even come to one sin. "*There is no righteous person on the earth who only does good and never sins.*" It is impossible for a person to totally get rid of his self-absorption, but he still must try to balance his needs with others' needs. The *Gemara*²² says that one should combine shelo *lishmah* (ulterior motives) with *lishmah* (pure motives).

It is a person's job to examine his deeds and make sure that he's not only acting for his own concerns. We will give a few examples.

A person goes to a shiur. Why did he come to the *shiur*? We are not speaking about someone who is bored in his house, so he comes to a *shiur*. We are speaking about someone who comes to a *shiur* because he really wants to learn Torah. Why, indeed, does he want to learn Torah? He knows that *Chazal* say that if a person doesn't learn Torah, he won't be resurrected from the dead in the future. A person wants to live forever, and he knows that in order for this to happen, he has to learn Torah. It seems like such a simple reason.

Is he coming to learn only for his own survival, or because he is also worried for others? If he's only concerned for himself, he will still get rewarded for his *mitzvah* in learning Torah, but he has taken the holiest thing in Creation, the Torah, and he has used it all for himself.

We can compare this to a guest who visits the king's palace, and he takes the king's crown off his head and wears it. Such a person is really rebelling against the king and deserves the death penalty. If

²² *Pesachim 50b*

a person is coming to a shiur to learn Torah only because he is concerned about his future, he is taking the most precious thing in Creation – the holy Torah – and using it all for himself.

A deeper kind of person not only worries for his own learning, but he worries that others should learn too. Even if he doesn't get another person to come to a shiur, he can decide before the shiur that he will give a percentage of his reward to other Jews.

How many Jews unfortunately haven't been worthy to have the Torah in their life! How will they get up by *techiyas hameisim*? What will be with them?! But if certain righteous individuals give them a percentage of their reward for learning, they will merit to be revived.

If a person gives away some of his reward for learning to other Jews, first of all, he might very well bring other Jews to complete *Teshuvah*, in the merit of the Torah that he has given to them which can awaken their inner world. On a deeper note, a person like this can help other Jews merit eternity!

The *Gemara* states that ignoramuses who don't learn Torah still have hope. If someone benefits a Torah scholar from his assets, it is considered as if he clings to the *Shechinah*. But many people, besides for not learning any Torah, don't even help a Torah scholar. They give charity, but not for Torah causes. What will be with them? How will they get up by *techiyas hameisim*!?

There are millions of Jews all over the world who have no Torah in their life, and they have never even said *Shema* once in their life. If a person wants to care about any of these Jews, what can he do? People usually don't have the strength to open up a new *kiruv* organization, and they aren't interested in going around raising money. So what can a person do if he wants to help all these Jews?

There is something you can do. You can sit in the *beis midrash* and hear a *shiur*, and as you listen to the *shiur*, you can be giving merits to the whole world. How? By giving away part of your reward to those who haven't merited to learn Torah yet in their life.

The point of meriting the public (*mezakeh es harabim*) is to leave one's private life.

Donating A Building...For Who?

A person donates a building to become a *shul*. He gets his name plastered on the entrance so everyone should see his name, and he gets the rights to the first *Mi Shebeirach* every Shabbos. He has all kinds of demands.

Now, if he would donate the building so that it should be a place of learning and closeness to Hashem, why would he need to donate the building in his name? Does Hashem not know who donated the building? Hashem knows every private thought; He surely knows that someone donated a million-dollar building.

But the donor is thinking about himself. He wants the whole neighborhood to know that it was him who donated the building, and he wants to be in all the newspapers. Even though much Torah will be learned in this building due to his charity, all he thought about was himself.

If a person would really search to live a true kind of life, and he wants to donate a shul or beis midrash, I am not saying he has to do this purely for the sake of Heaven, but at least he should be ready to give up some of his reward to others who have no Torah or *mitzvos* in their life. Is he prepared to do this, or is he just thinking the whole time: “I donated it, I’m the boss over here, It’s all about my name...!”

The Root of Arguments – Thinking Only About Yourself

If we reflect, we can see that this point affects all areas of life.

Most marriage problems are not because a person has a bad heart and is mean to his wife. There are many husbands who are wonderful, nice people – yet they still have serious problems in their marriage. Why? It is because people are simply absorbed in themselves and only worry about themselves.

When a person lives with the goal of how he can nourish others, and *Baruch Hashem* he gets married, he sits for at least two minutes a day and thinks: “How can I give more to my wife? How can I help her more?”

There are some people who think all day about how they can get more out of people, but there are others who think: How can I give to others?

When a person gets into a fight in shul about certain honors and privileges that he feels should go to him, or when people are involved in strife and heated arguments, the root of this all is because each person is thinking only for himself.

This is an internal kind of question: How does a person look at his life? Is he looking to unify with others by giving to them (which is what Hashem intended the world to be like when He created it), or is he just living life as he naturally does, worrying only for himself since the time he was a little child? When a person only cares for himself in his life, he thinks that everything is about him, and he resembles someone who lived in the Generation of the Flood, who were erased from existence due to their selfish lifestyle.

Giving Must Be Truthful

Many people are careful to give *maaser*, yet it doesn’t necessarily make them into better people. Why is this so? It is because although they are involved with giving, they are not doing so out of concern for others, but simply because they know that *Chazal* say that giving *maaser* makes one wealthy...

We can see that many people give *tzedakah*, yet their money isn't going to the right places. *Chazal* indeed say that a person has to be worthy of his *tzedakah* going to the right places. A person donates a new *shul*, and they can barely get a *minyán* to come....

Why do these things happen? It is because when the person gave the money, he didn't give it with the intention of helping others – he did it all for his own merits. If that his intention, his money won't end up in the right places.

But if a person gives something to another with his heart, he is truly giving, and Hashem helps such a person's money go to the right destination.

How This Affects Your Own Spiritual Situation

If a person looks at life with this proper attitude, he will find himself not only improving his interpersonal relationships, but even his relationship with Hashem will improve.

“What you don't want done to you, do not do to others.” Hillel said that this is point is the entire Torah. How can this be the whole Torah? How can interpersonal relationships be everything? What about one's relationship with Hashem?

There are many answers to this, but along the lines of our discussion, the answer is because our issues with Hashem and our issues we have with people are all the same issue: that a person is thinking only about himself, lives for himself and worries only for himself.

But when a person gets used to giving to others with the right kind of attitude – because he has a desire to bestow good upon others – he is fulfilling the purpose of creation, which is to help others. He will also find that he has an easier time when it comes to holding back from a sin.

The root of sinning is because a person is used to thinking and worrying only a about himself.

When a person slowly gets used to giving to others, he leaves his selfish mindset that everything is all about him. If a certain evil desire comes to him, it will be easier for him to control himself from giving in to the *yetzer hora*, because he has already gotten used to the idea of not only worrying about what's in it for himself.

If a person doesn't get used to giving up something for someone else, then when is faced with a sin, it will be hard for him to have self-control, because he is so used to always fulfilling what he wants.

But if he has gotten used to nullifying his desires for other people, this will weaken his selfishness, and when he faces a temptation to sin, he has given himself more tools to deal with it. He has learned how to not give in to something he wants, and with Hashem's help, he will be able to overpower his evil desire.

Worry That Another Person Should Have A Good Year

We are in the days of mercy, a time in which anyone who feels a little bit of spiritually aspires to prepare properly for *Yomim Noraim* and merit to be written for a good year. What can a person do to merit a good year?

There are many tips to merit a good year, but often these tips are superficial and do not get to the root. For example, if a teenager doesn't want to get up in the morning to *daven*, you can offer him a prize for getting up, and if he is being too fresh toward his parents, you can get him to stay out of the house when there is any tension going on. There are all kinds of ideas out there.

But there is another way to deal with problems in a child, and that is to treat the problem at its root. You need to get through to his soul. If you solve the root, everything else will get solved with it, if not for the most part.

When a person arrives at *Yomim Noraim*, if he all cares about is that he should have a good year, he is already preparing to fail. If someone really wants to have a good year, he should first care that other people in the world should have a good year. How can a person do this? The first thing to do is that a person must look for ways how he can worry that others should have a good year.

There are people who feel inspired one day to buy a present for their child, so they go into a store and ask the salesperson what to buy. Such a person isn't giving from himself – he's getting advice from the outside. The deeper a person becomes, the more he searches within himself what to give to others. If a person is waiting to be told what to do in every situation, he is like a toddler who has to be told everything: do this, do that. A person who matures doesn't need others to tell him what to do.

Therefore, a person has to first think to himself: How can I worry that others should have a good year? Even if he doesn't come up with a way, the fact that he is thinking that others should have a good year is already a big accomplishment. He is preparing for *Rosh HaShanah* with a deep perception that he doesn't only live for himself. This is the root of being to improve oneself.

We are all hoping to have a good year, but have we changed at all since last year? Have we tried to improve ourselves at all? Take at least a minute a day and think how you can help someone – whether physically or spiritually. The point is to get used to thinking for just a minute a day in which one is not just living for himself, and to see if he is really giving to others. Don't give to get honored or even to get *Olam HaBa* – just give for the sake of giving!

If a person takes these words to heart, then just as he will learn to worry about others, so will Hashem worry about him, measure for measure. Just like a person will get used to giving to others without expecting to gain something in return, so will Hashem give to him.

This growth process must be done slowly and step after step. Don't try to jump to high levels so fast. Just take this one point with you throughout the rest of the year – it is not difficult.

May Hashem merit us and all of *Klal Yisrael* to have a good, sweet year.

1.5 | *Mussar Vs. Chassidus*²³

Yiras Hashem Vs. Ahavas Hashem

Rosh HaShanah is both a day of *yiras Hashem* (fear of Hashem) and *ahavas Hashem* (love of Hashem). It is a day of *yiras Hashem* because it is the *Yom HaDin*, the Day of Judgment, but it is also a day of *ahavas Hashem*, as it is written, “Seek Hashem where He is found.”

It is well-known that the path of *mussar sefarim* deal mainly with *yiras Hashem*, with being afraid of Hashem and being afraid of sin, while the path of *Chassidus* deal with *ahavas Hashem*, with the closeness to Hashem that can be found in something.

Of course, it is not possible to have one without the other. We cannot have *yiras Hashem* without *ahavas Hashem*, nor can we have *ahavas Hashem* without *yiras Hashem*. So what is *mussar*, and what is *Chassidus*?

It is written, “Remove yourself from evil, and do good”. The path of *mussar* focuses on avoiding evil and divesting ourselves from it, while *Chassidus* focuses on how we can come to the good, on actually arriving at the “good” that we are striving for. “Remove yourself from evil” personifies *mussar*, whereas *Chassidus* personifies what is written, “Do good.”

With *Chassidus*, a person focuses on “doing good” (focusing on one’s closeness to Hashem), and that itself removes a person from evil. The *Baal Shem Tov* said that although “Remove yourself from evil” seems to come before “do good,” really, a person has to remove evil by doing good.

For example, let’s say a person has *gaavah* (haughtiness). How does he work on this bad *middah* (or any bad *middah*)? With *Mussar*, a person focuses on how bad it is to be haughty. But with *Chassidus*, a person is able to remove his haughtiness by thinking about how it distances him from being close to Hashem.

Yiras HaOnesh Vs. Yiras HaRomemus

On the *Yom HaDin*, there are two kinds of *yirah*. There is *yiras haonesh* (fear of punishment) and there is *yiras haromemus* (fear of Hashem’s greatness).

The first kind of fear is possible even from a human king, but the second kind of *yirah* is only possible toward Hashem. On *Rosh HaShanah*, the kind of *yirah* to have – according to the way of *Chassidus* – is to have *yiras haromemus*, fear of Hashem’s greatness. In this approach, *Yom HaDin* is not simply to fear punishment, but to be afraid of being distanced from closeness to Hashem.

²³ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/droshos-mussar-vs-chassidus>

According to the path of *Chassidus*, the person isn't being afraid of the judgment of *Yom HaDin*, but of the fear of not being close to Hashem.

The closeness to Hashem on *Rosh HaShanah* that everyone can grasp is: the knowledge and awareness that Hashem exists. All of the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* are days of closeness to Hashem, but *Rosh HaShanah* is the climax of this closeness – because it is the day where a person is standing before the King in judgment, and not because the person is afraid of the judgment, but because a person feels such an intense closeness to Hashem during judgment.

The *Arizal* said that when a person cries suddenly on *Rosh HaShanah* and he doesn't know why, it is a sign that he is being judged at that time. What does this mean? Does it mean that he is scared of being judged, or does it mean that he is having *yiras haromemus* – being afraid of distanced from closeness to Hashem?

When a person cries suddenly feels himself crying on *Rosh HaShanah*, it is a fear of not being close to Hashem. This is the way of *Chassidus* – it is not a fear of punishment, but a fear of being distanced from the King. It is a *yiras haromemus*.

But the way of *Mussar* is different. *Mussar* is about *yiras ha'onesh*, fear of punishment, because according to *mussar*, the more a person thinks about judgment, the more afraid he grows of the punishment, and this is because he becomes aware of the reality of sin.

Avodah Vs. Emunah

These are two general, root ways to serve Hashem: the path of *mussar* and the path of *chassidus*. On *Rosh HaShanah*, these two ways of *avodas Hashem* take on an even more detailed meaning. Let us explain the difference between these two ways.

With *mussar*, a person essentially sees himself on this world, and he wants to become connected to Hashem in Heaven. He has things which are holding him back, and he needs to remove these obstacles to get there. *Chassidus*, however, is a different viewpoint: A person comes from above, from Heaven, but he has something dividing him from Hashem. With *Chassidus*, the person is already connected to Heaven – he only needs to stay away from things that will take away his connection.

With *chassidus*, a person doesn't have to come up with a new relationship to Hashem – all he has to do is protect it, by avoiding sin. It's like two friends who are loyal to each other – it's not that they have to renew their friendship; they just have to protect their friendship by not betraying each other. But the view of *mussar* is to renew the friendship when it gets shaky.

The depth behind these two ways is that *mussar* is based on “*avodah*”, whereas *chassidus* is based on “*emunah*”. We will explain this. The view of *chassidus* is that there is already a relationship with Hashem, but the person has to reveal it more. Of course, even with *chassidus* a person has to know that *avodah* has to come before *emunah* -- but the person knows that he is already connected to Hashem, and he merely has to protect this relationship and reveal it more.

But the view of *mussar* is that a person isn't yet close to Hashem, so he has to acquire a relationship with Hashem by working to get there. He has to build this relationship. *Mussar* focuses on the "reality" – that he has many sins and shortcomings which he must remove, in order to build up a closeness to Hashem.

Each way has its dangers. The danger in *chassidus* is that a person might come to imagine that he's already at a high level, and the danger with *mussar* is that he can lose his aspirations to go higher, since he deals with "reality."

The Goal Is Always The Same

Thus, both *mussar* and *chassidus* have the same goal: to reach closeness to Hashem. The goal is always the same, but the only difference is how to begin. With *mussar*, a person must feel that he isn't yet close to Hashem and he must build up a relationship with Him, and with *chassidus*, a person already feels close to Hashem, but he must reveal it more and protect it.

The *Baal Shem Tov* was *niftar* on Shavuot, while the *Vilna Gaon* was *niftar* on Succos. There were those who asked that it should've been the other way around: the *Baal Shem Tov*, who fought for *ahavas Hashem*, should have been *niftar* on Succos, which is the happiest time of the year – and the *Vilna Gaon*, who fought against *chassidus*, should have died on Shavuot, the time of mainly learning Torah! But the answer to this is a deep point: both of them had both *yiras Hashem* and *ahavas Hashem*! The *Baal Shem Tov* and the *Vilna Gaon* only differed in where a person should **start** in his *avodas Hashem*.

The difference between *mussar* and *chassidus* is not about **what** to do in *avodas Hashem*. It is only a question of where to **start** with, and **how** to get there.

Body Viewpoint Vs. Soul Viewpoint

The Maharal wrote that when a person sins, it is only *mikreh* – a "coincidence". What this means is that a person is a soul, but he is covered with a body. When a person sins, the body of the person has become spiritually dirtied from the sin. The soul becomes covered with these dirty "garments" of the body, but the soul itself always remains pure.

According to the viewpoint of *mussar*, the person **is** identified by how he uses his power of free will. When a person chooses to sin, he has become dirtied from the sin, and this will also mean that his soul has become dirtied, so he must fix himself. This view essentially comes from the body. But *Chassidus* has the viewpoint of the soul: When a person sins, his soul still remains pure, and it is only his power of free will which has become damaged. The person must fix the misuse of his power of free will, but the person himself still remains pure even after sin.

Closeness Vs. Fear

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.

Each Person Has His Own Way

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.

1.6 | *Nothing But The Truth*²⁴

Why Hasn't Moshiach Come Yet?

Chazal say, “Why hasn't Ben Dovid yet come yet – why didn't he come today, yesterday, or the day before it?”

It is because nothing has changed. Just like we were the same yesterday and the day before it, and we didn't change, that is why Moshiach didn't come yet.

We are in a situation which is not good. We can't say it's totally bad, but it is not good either. I don't think there's anyone here who thinks that he has a good situation.

We only have one hope: we must change. If we remain the same, we have no hope.

What hope can we have? That each person should say “I need to change”? It's not enough that only you should change, because this is not just about you. The world was not created for us to be self-absorbed and only worry for ourselves. We need to unify with each other.

A Spiritual Slumber

I will speak about something that is very painful to speak about. We are in one giant slumber. We are in a *total* slumber. Anyone with a little sensitivity to the inner spiritual reality that exists, when he walks in the street, can feel like the world is *Gehinnom*.

I am not talking about even bad places. I am talking about a regular street you walk in. It's *Gehinnom*. Why is it *Gehinnom*? Because we are in a world that lives so far from a life of truth. The lifestyle of today is totally upside-down.

There is almost no one who worries for others; each person lives for himself and worries for himself, like how he will make money, and he also worries a little for his spirituality. But if someone else's child gets sick, does anyone go to the hospital to visit him...?

We live today in one giant slumber.

What Is Wrong Today?

After this *shiur*, everyone will go home and continue on usual, some with a negative outlook and some with a positive outlook, and continue on with routine as usual.

²⁴ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/rosh-hashannah-005-nothing-truth>

People are wondering: “There is Torah everywhere, there are thousands of *shiurim* going on. What’s the problem??” The problem is very clear. The problem is that we are in a world where truth has no bearing on a person’s life.

People who run after This World run only after This World, and people who are spiritual only care for themselves; there is almost no one who is truthful. What hope is there that reality will change...?

The average person doesn’t feel responsibility even for himself, and surely he doesn’t feel responsible for this generation. “Who am I, what can I do?” he thinks. And the less people think and reflect, the more they get ‘buried’ into their desires: “*Kivros HaTaavah*”.

We must know what Hashem wants from us in this situation we are in. We are not merely in a situation in which we have certain kinds of problems; rather, there is one huge problem enveloping us today. A *frum* person keeps Shabbos and keeps kosher; he doesn’t have problems with that. The problem is that a *frum* Jew these days doesn’t know what it means to be a Jew! He identifies himself, deep down, as a non-Jew. He knows that he dresses like a Jew, but deep down, he feels disconnected from his own Yiddishkeit, *rachmana litzlan*. Even without coming to such a decision openly, that is the attitude deep down in himself.

There are Jews who aren’t observant at all, as well as those who are a little observant. But we must know what the problem really is. The problem is that just like a sick person needs a doctor, so are we spiritually sick, and we don’t know that there is an inner kind of life. We don’t see it.

Self-Absorption

Not only don’t we see it in Jews who aren’t *frum*. Even in observant Jews, we can’t see an inner kind of life going on. Even when people pursue spirituality, they are self-absorbed in their own spiritual concerns.

We were created to reveal Hashem upon the world²⁵ – not just in ourselves, but to the world. That is what we should get up for in the morning! If not, one is disconnected from the purpose of living.

It is very painful, these words. Why are they painful? I will give a simple example why.

The Real Help That Is Needed

Here in America, there are many *chessed* organizations. *Baruch Hashem*, people help each other. But how many places are there in the world where a person can be guided in what the truth about life is? When it comes to physical help, there is a lot of assistance being offered. There are even

²⁵ As explained in *sefer Daas Tevunos of the Ramchal*

organizations that help a person go on vacation he needs so that he can relax. But why is there no organization that can help a person have *emes* (truth) in his life? There is very little truth in the world.

People will respond to this, “But there are many organizations that help a person become a *baal teshuvah*.” This has nothing to do with it. Doing *teshuvah* is not just for people who aren’t wearing a *kippah*. We *daven* every day that Hashem return us to *teshuvah shelaimah* (complete repentance). Why aren’t people crying out when they *daven* for this? Why are people only crying out for their physical needs? Why aren’t people who keep *mitzvos* being helped to return to *Teshuvah Shelaimah*...?

What does Hashem want from us? He wants us to search for the truth and not be able to fall asleep from it at night, just like a person can’t fall asleep at night when he owes money. But the truth of what life is about doesn’t bother us!

Turn Over A New Page In Your Life

You can understand that it took time for me to come here and speak and to go back. What is the reason that I came here? I did not come here to say words of inspiration. Other speakers will come after me and do that. I came here for a whole different point: You should know that your life as it was until now, must end.

We all know one day we will die. You should know that from now on, starting today, you have no more of your previous life. Turn over a whole new page in your life, of how you live life.

Understand that there is a deep problem with the whole lifestyle of today. Just as we see that people who are not frum are living their life wrong, so too must we look at ourselves and realize that we are living our life wrong.

A Lack of Truthful Living

Although a person can look like a good person, someone who does *chessed* and helps people, if he takes away families for vacations for Shabbos (there are organizations that do this!), although he has a good heart, it is his actions that are incorrect.²⁶

When we examine ourselves, we all know that there are things we have to improve; true. But we have to be aware that there is a bigger problem we have: we are missing the whole point of life, because we are disconnected from living a truthful kind of life. Our whole life is based on erroneous beliefs.

26 Editor’s Note: It is unclear from the derashah about what exactly is bothering the Rav about these chessed programs, but it seems that it is because a lack of priorities and spiritual values, perhaps because the mundane atmosphere of these hotels and places detracts from the holiness of Shabbos.

Raising Good Children

Here is a very simple example. A person has a five or six year old child. What would he like to give him? He wants to give him good clothing, a good kindergarten, good food, good sleep, happiness, toys, etc. But does he ever think about giving over to his child the truth of life?

Hashem has given a child to a father to raise. For what purpose? We need to worry for our children and give them their physical needs, of course; but that's not the purpose of why Hashem gives us a child. Hashem has given us a child so that *we can raise him to be a true Jew, and to live a truthful life.*

A non-Jew also wants his child to be nourished and happy. If so, what is the difference between the way a Jew should raise a child and the way a non-Jew raises his child? Physically, there is no difference. A non-Jew who has a child in the house, he also wants his child to have it good. The difference is, that a Jew is supposed to raise his child and guide him to live a truthful kind of life.

From morning to night, a father works so that his family can be supported with food and clothing and be able to go to school. For what purpose? When a father comes home at night, he's tired and exhausted from the whole day. How then can he teach his children about the truth of life? He feels it's too much pressure! He says: "When am I supposed to find time for that?! Maybe on Shabbos I'll have time."

But think about it. Hashem gave you a child so that you can teach him what the G-dly truth of life is. Yet, the reality we see is not concerned with this. Most of a person's life is spent on working so that the family can have their physical needs - and the inner essence of life is abandoned.

Why? It's very simple. It's because the father himself doesn't consider the truth of life to be a priority by him. If the truth would burn inside him, and the external aspects of life would be seen as less important, he would be able to find time to teach his child about what it means to live a truthful life. But when the father doesn't have this value, and he does not think that life is about truth, he has an apathetic attitude towards life - and that will be all that he can give over to his children.

We all know what's going on in our hearts. Even if it bothers you, does it make you lose sleep at night? I will tell you clearly: If you can fall asleep at night with no trouble, you will not reach the truth of life. If you have trouble sleeping at night from this, then you will reach a truthful life.

Realizing The Situation of our Times

But we must understand that there is a problem. We hear inspiring lectures, we come to the lectures, but of what help is it for us? We all go back to routine afterwards. We don't think we can escape the routine.

I always hear the question: "In a time like this, if I have to stop working to make a living [so that I can dedicate my life to pursuing only truth], how will I eat?" But compare this to the following. Imagine if one's child is hospitalized, and he has to keep going to the hospital to be with his child.

He can't be at work. He takes shifts with his wife in visiting his child. How come they don't wonder about the question, "How will we get by the month if we aren't going to work? How will we eat?" It's because their child needs them. They realize that they have no choice; they have to take off from work and be with their child, even though that means they won't be getting paid that month.

So why don't people realize that their spiritual situation is sick? If people would know how ill they are in their spiritual situation, they would immediately leave work so they can dedicate themselves more to searching for truth, because they would see that they have no other choice. Why can't one feel that his spiritual situation is devoid, and then go seclude himself for three hours and concentrate on this, and realize the truth?

We must realize that we are in a situation in which materialism is where we are getting our whole life from. It won't help to speak about spiritual matters; we can speak about *ruchniyus* (spirituality) for an hour, for 2 hours, 10 hours, 100 hours, even 1000 hours, but it won't help at all! I can't say that it's pointless; maybe a little bit it will help. But it won't give a person hope to really change.

The only thing we can do is: decide to change.

Being Prepared To Lead A Truthful Life

It's not easy to live your hometown that you've been living in for 30 years. You are comfortable here and you have a firm livelihood and schools for your children. But if you realize that the place you live in is not a truthful place, you can indeed leave it, even though you have no idea what will be.

True, maybe you won't have livelihood and maybe you will have to find new schools for your children, but it's better than the alternative, because if you stay in the untruthful place you are living in, your spiritual situation is doomed. When you realize that you need truth in your life and that you must leave the place you are in, it will be easier for you to leave it all behind, and instead search for the G-dly truth about life²⁷.

In the world we live in today, it doesn't seem like we need to make extreme changes. We know that we need to better and improve ourselves, but we don't see why extreme changes need to be made. But it's much worse than what we think. Just like a person in a false kind of community must leave it - because he has no choice - so must a person know, that even if he lives in a place which seems truthful, he knows good and well that his life is empty! How much truth do we have in throughout our 24 hours a day...?

One must clearly recognize why he lives, and once he is clear in that, he must charter a new life for himself. The new life must be a life in which truth is the central priority to him, and it's not enough to pursue truth for a half hour in the morning and an hour at night - it means that truth must be constantly be pursued throughout the entire day. The truth demands that.

²⁷ See *Tefillah #055 - Searching For Truth*

Inspiration Vs. Real Change

I want to ask a question. Is there anyone here who thinks that the words here are not true? You are all silent; that does that mean you agree? If you agree with the words here, then who here is willing to do something about this, practically?

It is not enough to say, “We’ll try”. If your child is sick, would you just “try” to go to the doctor, or would you actually do something about it..?

What is the point of me speaking here? Will it help for me to keep speaking again and again? Don’t say “*Naaseh V’Nishmah*” to me. Don’t accept these words here simply because I am saying it. Say “*Naaseh V’Nishmah*” to Hashem!

What is practically resulting from these speeches? If people here will actually come and tell me that they want to come here because they want to change their life, I will set aside time to speak to them. But if people just come to me and tell me that they are hearing nice ideas from me and hearing inspiration, and if they tell me that they would rather hear a softer kind of speech that makes them feel good – of what use would this be?? If people are taught and taught what they have to do but they don’t practically change, and they go back to routine, it’s a waste of time for them to hear all that they heard.

The Message

Know that Hashem is the One who created us, and the One whom we must serve is Hashem.

If we really decide that we are ready to change our life no less than how a non-religious person is ready to change over his entire life so he can become a *baal teshuvah*, then there is a point of me continuing to speak, because it will lead to practical change. If not, then I don’t have time to speak, and it will be a waste of time for you if you come to the speeches. [For example], if a Rav is told that no one is listening to his *halachah shiur*, there is no point in giving the *shiur*, because it’s better that they not realize how many mistakes they are making, rather than committing their sins on purpose. But if people really come to a shiur because they want to practice what is being said in the *shiur*, then there is a point in giving the *shiur*.

Facing Reality

People might think that the words here are too harsh. But imagine if a person brings his child to a doctor and they tell him that he needs heart surgery. The father can’t deal with the shock, so he tells them, “Please, just tell me it’s a problem with his foot.” We get scared when we can’t deal with the truth. But we really cannot run away from reality.

People are running away from reality and they complain to me, “Why do you have to talk so harshly?” But I’m not talking harshly, I’m just telling you what reality is! You can’t run away from reality, so you have to learn how to actually deal with it.

I hope that the people here understand what exactly is wanted over here. The hope I have here is that you should live in the kind of life that Hashem wants you to live in, a life in which serving Hashem is your central priority, and that materialistic matters are less important to you.

If this sounds like too extreme of a change, I can’t argue with you. You asked me to speak here, and this is what I had to say. If you came here and you didn’t like what you heard, you won’t come back and hear another of these speeches. But even if you wanted to hear the words here, you must actually seek to actualize the words here in your life.

I have done my obligation towards Hashem by coming here to speak. When I return to Heaven after 120, I will have to give a self-accounting to Hashem, and I will be asked, “There are many people swooning around on This World, running and running and running after This World. Why didn’t you tell them to stop for one day in their life and say to them, “You will end up dying like everyone else dies. Instead of dying amidst running around in chasing desires on This World, why don’t you at least die from reflecting deeply on the G-dly truth of life?”

I can’t stifle myself from saying these words, because these words are the simple truth, and since they are the truth, they must be heard. But it’s painful for me that no one else is saying these words; but it is the truth.

Returning To Our Temimus (Original Purity)

I will be very happy if people understand that the words here are words that even a five-year old should know. Because this is the lifestyle we are supposed to live with and train our children with.

But what does a five-year-old child see today? He gets put on a bus, and he sees all kinds of ads on the bus. What does it say in these ads? “*Ain Od Milvado*”? “Know from where you came from and to where you are going, and before Whom you will have to give an accounting?” No, the ads are about a new car, or something new that comes from America. That is the kind of surroundings that a child is growing up in, and this is the air he breathes; he is breathing in the opposite of the real reality we are supposed to live in.

What is the truth? The truth is as the Jews were told, “*Follow Me into the desert, to an unsowed land.*” The *temimus* (simple belief) that a Jew has is that besides for serving Hashem, we have nothing else in our life, and that this is the purpose of life which must fill us constantly.

Chazal say “Make the Torah permanent and your labor temporary”. In your actual soul, as the *Nefesh HaChaim* says, you can have “Torah and *derech erez* at the same time” - meaning, even as you’re going about your mundane affairs, your thoughts and heart can be connected to Torah in-depth. This is the epitome of a “normal” Jew!

Preparing Ourselves For The Time of The Future

May Hashem merit us that all who are sitting here, and even those who are not sitting here, should understand – that the world we are in is only temporary. It will one day be destroyed totally; it will become a dot. A new world will be revealed in its place, a world of total purity, a true world, a world in which there is nothing except knowledge of Hashem. That is the future world that will be revealed.

If one yearns for knowledge of Hashem, then when that future world becomes revealed, he will find pleasure when he experiences the revelation of the future world. But if he didn't yearn to know Hashem more, he never got used to what it means to yearn for Hashem, so he won't know what to do with himself! All he knew of from his life was the bank account, the phone ringing, meetings, business deals, and other activities he was busy with from this world. He never lived in the world of the future which Hashem will reveal.

There is a very sharp statement of the Baal Tanya, who was asked: "Why didn't Moshiach come yet?" (It's unclear why the question was asked in the first place, because it's obvious why Moshiach didn't come yet. But that was the question). The Baal HaTanya answered, "The Moshiach you're hoping for will never come, and the Moshiach that will come is the Moshiach that you never hoped for."

People want Moshiach to come so they can go free from their problems and their stress, from financial problems, from health problems, from problems with *shidduchim*. This was what the Baal HaTanya meant: People want Moshiach to come just so that their problems will go away, and such a Moshiach will never come, because that's not Moshiach! The Moshiach that will come is a person who will reveal the truth to all people, that besides for knowing Hashem, there is nothing else we have.

If a person is bothered all day that he doesn't know Hashem as much as he could, that is someone who truly awaits Moshiach, because he is awaiting the purpose of Moshiach's arrival. Without awaiting this truth, a person won't be able to survive in the future, because he never yearned for it.

May Hashem give us all a yearning to know only of Him - and nothing else except this.

1.7 | *Preparing For Rosh HaShanah*²⁸

It is written, “*Seek Hashem where He is found*” [which the Sages expound upon to mean as referring to the Ten Days of Repentance in between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*].

When there is closeness between two people, is it possible that one of them is close to the other, while the other is not close?

Compare this to a tinted window, where you can see through one side of the window, while a person outside the window cannot see into it, because the outsider sees the opaque side of the window.

Hashem is close to us, and He is especially close us during the Ten Days of Hashem, of which it is written, “*Seek Hashem where He is found.*” He is close to us, but are we close to Him? Just because He is close to us, that does not mean that we are close to Him. In order for us to become close to Him, there is a certain *avodah* we must do.

Returning to the example of the opaque window, if we want to be able to see through both sides of the window, we need to clear away the layer on the window that makes it tinted, so that will become a clear glass. We need to also make our window clear in our relationship with Hashem – we are on the side of the window that is opaque, and we need to remove the opaque layer so that it can become transparent, and to be able to see the closeness we have with Hashem.

These days are called *Yemei Ratzon*, Days of Will. Hashem wants to be close to us, but it is we who have to reveal a *ratzon* for closeness with Him.

How many *retzonos* does Hashem have? There are 613 *mitzvos*. Does that mean that He has 613 things he wants from us? It’s really all 613 actions that are all about one will He has from us. Compare this to someone making a wedding. He has to order a hall, a caterer, a photographer, new clothes. Is it all a bunch of details? It’s all about one thing alone: the wedding.

How many *retzonos* do we have? Hashem has one desire alone from us. When we get ourselves to want what He wants, we are beginning the correct path. Otherwise, there is only one side to the relationship – Hashem is always close to us, but *we* won’t feel close to Him.

Does this mean that we should only want to be close to Hashem, and that we shouldn’t want anything else other than this? Does anyone believe this is impossible?

Here is a simple question. If Hashem would come and tell us, “*Follow Me into the desert, in a land that is unsowed*” - would we agree to follow Hashem into the desert? I’m not talking about when we were enslaved in Egypt and Hashem would come to us and tell us that He’s taking us out. I’m

²⁸ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/rosh-hashannah-032-preparing-rosh-hashanna-questions-answers>

talking about if Hashem would ask us to leave the comfort of our homes and follow Him into the desert.

There are two kinds of exiles. In Egypt, we have exile with mortar and bricks. There is another kind of exile – when people are enslaved to their money and their materialistic comforts.

Physical labor is one kind of exile on a person. But if a person is tied down too much to a comfortable situation, that is also an exile. He can't leave his comfortable situation to go be with Hashem in the desert. He has various *retzonos* (desires) that he can't part from. How will the *Yom HaDin* help him change...?

On *Rosh HaShanah*, Hashem renews the world, because *Rosh HaShanah* was the birth of the world. We can become a new creation each year. Just like there is a new year, so can our soul become new. We can choose for ourselves a new life this year; we can begin again anew. And what does it mean to start a new beginning?

It means that a person should want one thing alone.

Let me explain a bit more. The *Gemara* says that you can acquire something for another person even without the other person's knowledge, because you are benefitting him. Can we take a non-Jew and turn him into a Jew, because it's good to become a Jew? The *Gemara* says that one cannot take a slave and convert him, because since he is used to being a slave, he is used to living an irresponsible life, so making him a Jew won't be a benefit him. It's better for him to leave him as a non-Jew and do as he pleases, rather than become a Jew when he's full of desires that he can't part from. But if one owns a child who is a slave, then the master can convert him, because the child hasn't yet gotten used to a hedonistic life, and it will be a benefit for him to become a Jew.

The concept of separating ourselves from desires – do we view that as an obligation, or as something that's beneficial for us?

Here is a simple way of illustrating the concept. Hashem came to Shlomo HaMelech and asked him if he wants wisdom or wealth. What would we choose? We can't have both. Would we choose to know all of Shas and be willing to remain poor – or would we choose to be wealthy, but we won't know Shas?

When we prepare for *Rosh HaShanah*, it's very simple how we must prepare. "We have only one heart, to our Father in Heaven." We must get to a situation in which our true desire is – to be close to Hashem. A deeper way of understanding this is that our entire will should be for closeness to Hashem and to understand His Torah. Hashem knows what is going on in each person's heart, and He knows if the person really wants this or not, or if he's just saying that he wants it.

This is the *avodah* of the *Y'mei HaRatzon*, and this is how we prepare for *Rosh HaShanah*.

I'll tell you a story. In Yerushalayim there lives a certain *tzaddik*; it's not important to say who he is. One day an older bachelor came to him and told him he needs his *shidduch*. He asked him if he can do a certain *segulah* to get his *shidduch*. The *tzaddik* told him to say *Tehillim* and to do certain actions, and he told him, "When you do all these things, your level of *ruchniyus* will become higher,

and then you merit your *shidduch*.” However, the *bochur* didn’t want to do it. The *tzaddik* asked him, “Why not?” The *bochur* replied, “Since I believe exactly what you are saying, I am aware that doing these things will make my level of *ruchniyus* become higher, and then I will lose my *taavos* (physical desires)!”

Another story. Once the Chofetz Chaim had a dream in which he became wealthy. The next day, he fasted. When asked why, he said, “Why did I dream of such a thing? If it’s a real dream that I have, I need to fast in order to nullify the dream. If it’s from something I merely imagined about during the day, it is not either good that I’m even imagining of becoming wealthy.”

Now let’s talk very practically. If we were given one wish on *Rosh HaShanah* - what would we ask for? This is how we prepare for *Rosh HaShanah* – if one is very clear about what he wants, that shows what his true level is. A person can fool himself, but no one can fool Hashem. Hashem knows what each person really wants deep down.

In certain *Machzorim* there are *tefillos* in which one can ask Hashem for *Ruach HaKodesh*, for wealthy, and for holy children. If a person is *davening* for *Ruach HaKodesh*, he is probably delusional. If one *davens* for good children, that’s wonderful. If someone *davens* for wealth, that really means he wants wealth more than good children!

We are preparing for *Rosh HaShanah*, each to his own. Sit down and think of what you want to *daven* for on *Rosh HaShanah*. What, practically speaking, do we want to *daven* for on *Rosh HaShanah*?

This is how you can determine what your true level is. If you really seek closeness with Hashem and His Torah, then your deepest wish on *Rosh HaShanah* will be to pray for that, and then you are truly preparing for *Rosh HaShanah*. If not, you need to learn how to nullify your desires and desire the truth.

All other speeches you will hear are just inspiration, and they do not bring a person to having a true and practical *Avodah*.

This shows you what you really desire in life, and it shows you if you really want to be close to Hashem and Torah or not. If a person comes to the conclusion that it’s not his greatest desire, then *Rosh HaShanah* will merely pass by, and Hashem will be close to the person, but the person himself will not be close to Hashem.

Examine yourself deeply and find out what you really, really want deep down. I hope that all of you merit to find how your deepest desire is really to be close to Hashem and to His Torah, and to ***truly want*** that.

If you really and truly want to be close to Hashem, you will get there. If you don’t, I hope that you merit to want it.

Q&A With the Rav on Serving Hashem & Learning Torah

(Editor's Note: The following is a Q&A session with the Rav after this derashah, in which very fundamental questions were asked to the Rav about how to improve our Avodas Hashem, and how learning Torah comes into the equation. Many practical and important hashkafos were discussed here. The shiur was given to working B'nei Torah.)

Q1: What does Hashem want from us – to be here, or to be in Eretz Yisrael?

A: If I give you an answer, will you do it...? *Eretz Yisrael!* Specifically, in *Yerushalayim, Ir HaKodesh*.

Q2: How do we let go of the things from the past that are holding us back from improving?

A: If you can train yourself not to want those things, it won't be a struggle anymore. "Nothing stands in the way of the will", so why is it that people don't get what they want? It is because they don't really want! If someone really, truly wants something, he will end up getting it. Not that it will be easy. But he will reach his *ratzon*. The reason why people don't achieve their *ratzon* is not because of things that hold them back – it is because they don't have such a strong *ratzon*. There are people who achieve their *ratzon* even though they have the same difficulties and obstacles. Why? Because their *ratzon* is stronger. So it all depends on one's *ratzon*.

Q3: Why can't I be wealthy and also be close to Hashem?

A: You have to not want money; then, you'll be a real billionaire. Rabbeinu *HaKadosh* was wealthy; did he want the money? (As for Shlomo *HaMelech*, he was a king, so that's a different story). He accepted whatever Hashem gave him; in his mind, he felt, "If Hashem wants me to be wealthy, fine, if Hashem doesn't, then neither do I want". He was happy with whatever situation Hashem put him in. The entire question is what a person really wants.

Q4: Don't we *daven* on Shabbos before Rosh Chodesh for wealth?

A: It is referring to the "wealth" which *Chazal* describe: "Who is wealthy? He who is happy with his lot." When we ask for *kavod* (honor) what does that mean? Do we want *kavod*? Isn't *kavod* a bad thing? The *neshamah* itself is called *kavod*. When we are happy, we are disassociated from materialism, and then we can reach our *neshamah*, which is the real *kavod*.

(I want all of you to know that I'm not going to sit in Heaven on *Rosh HaShanah* and judge any person. We are all passing before Hashem on *Rosh Hashanah* – that is the truth. When I go away tomorrow, it won't change that. The truth remains the same truth, and one has to face Hashem the entire year, and even more so on *Rosh Hashanah*).

Q5: If a person sees that he has desires in himself that are not about becoming closer to Hashem, and it's only a few days left to Rosh HaShanah, how do we practically work on nullifying those desires?

A: This is an excellent question. Every day, for three times a day, go against your will. It doesn't have to be big things. Just practice not giving into what you want, for three times a day. For example, if you want to eat a certain food you desire, instead of avoiding it entirely, just hold back from it a little bit. If you want to hear something improper, train yourself for half a minute a day not to listen. These are all small things. Do them each day, for three times a day, and do it for all 365 days of the year. It should be a resolution you make for the entire year, every day of the year. Slowly but surely as you get used to this, you will nullify your *retzonos*.

Q6: How can we know if we are really improving and keeping to our resolutions to better ourselves that we made on Rosh HaShanah – maybe we are just imagining our growth? What is the real way to make our resolutions last for the rest of the year?

A: It is a very good question. Usually, our resolutions do not last for long. This is the reality that happens with most people; we see this in ourselves and in others. The Ramban says (based on the *posuk* "אם תעיררו ואם תתעוררו עד שתחפץ" that *hisorerus* (inspiration) needs to be put into a *cheifetz*, a "lasting desire". How do you make your inspiration last? The Ramchal says (in *sefer Derech Eretz Chaim*) that there is an easy piece of advice that bears great results: Every day, set aside an hour of your time and empty out all previous thoughts, and concentrate on the following: "What did the Avos do? What did Dovid *HaMelech* do?" Do nothing during this time of solitude, and just think about why you came onto the world. If you can't do it for an hour, do it for 30 minutes, and if you can't do 30 minutes, do it for 15 minutes. But it must be a set time in your schedule that you do every day. Don't go to sleep before you have reflected that day (for at least 15 minutes): "For what purpose do I live?" Accept upon yourself that you will do this every day.

If you want this resolution to last, accept upon yourself that if you miss it for a day, you will give 5000 dollars to *tzedakah*! (If 5000 dollars doesn't make you feel obligated, then it should be 10,000 dollars! Or 100,000 dollars!) The penalty you place upon yourself has to be to an amount that will bother you if you have to pay it, which will make you feel obligated to keep your resolution. In order for your resolution for this quiet reflection time every day to last, you need to accept yourself a penalty of a high amount of money, which makes you feel obligated to do it. Without accepting upon yourself a penalty, it's unlikely that you'll keep to the resolution, because you'll be tired sometimes and you won't feel like doing it. Therefore you should accept upon yourself to put 10 dollars (for example) in the *pushka* if you don't do the 15-minute *Avodah*; that will make you feel obligated.

I want you to understand that this is not advice just for you who are here. It is advice that I say to everyone, and those who accepted it upon themselves saw success. Because when you're scared of having to donate a large amount of money, it is an incentive that helps you make sure to fulfill it every day.

Q8: What do we think about during the 15 minutes of quiet reflection time?

A: That's also a good question, but first, make sure you have the prerequisite: If you just have these 15-minutes a day of quiet time, even if you don't think anything, you've already accomplished a lot, because it's a big feat to be able to put a halt to the action of life. Not that it's everything; it's

not everything. But you've already done a lot, if you manage to just have 15 minutes a day of time alone to yourself. We are usually bogged down from everyday life and we have no time alone to think, and only when it comes Erev *Rosh HaShanah* do we usually make personal reflection. If you have 15 minutes every day to yourself, you will see a change.

As for what to think during this time, think: "For what am I living for?" The more you get used to this, the more you will expand those thoughts. But the very first stage is to have this time alone and think to yourself "For what am I living for?" After realizing why you live, ask yourself, "Am I actually living my everyday life for that purpose? Am I heading towards the goal of life? If not, what can I do to change?" There's a lot to discuss after that, of course, but the basis for success is – and this is not my advice, but the Ramchal's advice – every day, have a set time in which you reflect to yourself. Just like you have three times every day that you *daven*, so can you have this set time every day to reflect to yourself about the purpose of life. It is a truthful method, and anyone who keeps to it sees success.

Q9: Instead of penalizing ourselves if we don't do the *hisbodedus* time every day, can we instead use a different method – to reward ourselves for doing it every day?

A: You want me to reward you? (Laughing in the audience). Who will reward you for doing it? You will pay yourself for doing it? I don't understand the question [please rephrase the question].

Q10: To do something special for ourselves, if we do it.

A: Let me explain. One method of change is to penalize yourself if you don't keep to the resolution, and another method is to be nice to yourself if you keep to it. I am going here with the first approach. Why am I not using the second method? The second method (being nice to yourself) has a drawback, because on nights that you feel lazy and you want to just go to sleep, you won't feel that motivated to do the 15-minute *Avodah*. But if you penalize yourself for not doing it, you'll be much more motivated to keep to your resolution. Check yourself, though, and see if perhaps the second method would work for you. If you think it will work for you, then you can use that method (and reward yourself for doing the *Avodah* every day), but only if it obligates as much as a penalty would obligate you. If not, it is pointless to try the second method.

Q11: 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?

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

Q12: If a person who works doesn't have much extra time throughout the day, and he only has 1 hour or 2 hours to himself, what should he learn as Yom Tov is approaching - should he devote his extra time to learning about the meaning of the coming Yom Tov [like if it's before Rosh HaShanah, should he learn about matters of Rosh HaShanah?], or should he instead learn Gemara and Halacha? And on a regular day as well, how should one split his learning?

A: Did you ever meet a businessman who never consulted with anyone for advice? Did you ever consult with someone and you only had one hour of your time? In other words – how much extra time do you really have? You for sure have more than 1 hour a day of extra time to yourself.

If you have 5 hours a day to yourself, there is a whole different answer to your question. 3 hours out of the 5 hours should definitely be spent on learning *Gemara*. If you have only 1 hour a day to yourself, you need to learn *Halacha*, otherwise you will remain an ignoramus and commit sins. If you have 3 hours a day of time to yourself, it's a different story.

I will give an answer assuming that you have 3 hours a day to yourself. I am not saying that this answer will apply to all people, but I will give an answer assuming that a person has 3 hours a day to himself.

[First I will ask you:] Learning *Gemara* with *iyun* (in-depth) – is that something you can do?

Q13: It's possible, but the problem is that learning Gemara with *iyun* will take up too much of the 3 hours a day we have to ourselves.

A: Of what purpose does a person live? Why do we have 24 hours a day? It doesn't "take up your time". Work takes up your time, but learning Torah in-depth doesn't "take up your time". All of our time only exists so that we can use our time to learn Torah in-depth!

With working at a job, the more time you put in, the more money you make. Learning Torah doesn't work like that. Learning Torah is about forming a deep connection in your soul with it.

In order to gain a deep connection with the Torah, it won't happen without learning Torah in-depth. It's not a question of "how much time" to put in. When you love your child, does it have to do with how much time you put into your child? It has nothing to do with your time; it is a deep truth that you feel.

[To illustrate what I mean], I have a sister in America who got married when she was 33, and she gave birth to twins. My father lives in Eretz Yisrael, and he flew in to America for the *bris*. It's already 4 months since the *bris*, and he misses the babies so much already; he doesn't have money to pay for a trip to America to come in and see them again. But he misses them so much; he wishes he could see them. Physically, he doesn't see his baby grandchildren, but in his soul, he is deeply connected with them, because he longs to see them.

Q14: Why is Gemara in-depth the deepest kind of connection a person can have with Hashem? I feel closer to Hashem when I learn Mesillas Yesharim!

A: Is learning *Mesillas Yesharim* a connection with Hashem or with the Torah? (Hashem). We must love Hashem, but we must also love His Torah. There is *ahavas Hashem* (love of Hashem) and *ahavas haTorah* (love of the Torah). They are not two separate matters, though; they must become interconnected.

Q15: There are people who don't feel a deep connection with Hashem when they learn Gemara, and they only feel it when they learn sefarim that talk about Avodas Hashem. So

what should they do when they have extra time to learn? [Should they learn Gemara, or should they learn about Avodas Hashem?]

A: When Rav Aharon Kotler *zt”l* first came to America, he had to convince parents to send their children to Yeshivos and learn Torah. They asked him, “What will come from our children? Will they become a Rav, a Rosh Yeshivah, a Dayan?” He told them, “Your child will become someone who learns Torah. That is what will come from him.”

We need to change our perspective towards our life. Hashem gave us 24 hours a day so that we can devote our time to Him and to His Torah. There is a curse given to mankind called “*parnassah*” (having to earn a living), and we need to deal with that curse. But we must know what the essence of life is; we need to breathe what life actually is. Learning Torah is not something that takes up your time. It is your soul itself; it is a very deep connection.

Q16: It’s hard for me to open up a Gemara, because it doesn’t get me to feel close to Hashem. So how can I practically spend my time on learning Gemara? It is similar to the previous question, that people don’t feel a bond with Hashem when they learn Gemara.

A: The *sefarim* bring a question: Who do you like more, your father or your mother? Hashem and the Torah are like our father and our mother, and to decide which of them we love more is like choosing if we love our father more or our mother more.

If someone feels like he’s not enjoying his learning, I will tell you the following story. There were two people I met last week. One person came to me and told me that he had to leave Kolel in order to go to work. He told me, “I had no choice.” I said to him, “Maybe it’s true that you had no choice and you needed to go to work. But did you at least cry on the day you left behind the *Gemara*?”

I met another person here whom I hadn’t seen in about 10 years. I said to him, “Nu, what’s with you?” He said to me, “*Baruch Hashem*, I have become an expert in Shas.” As I conversed with him, he mentioned to me that he’s thinking about a certain business he is pursuing. I said to him, “If you know Shas, how can it be that you’re thinking of going into business?!” He told me, “I learned all my years only for the sake of kavod (honor).”

If a person doesn’t feel enjoyment in learning, did he ever cry about that, that he doesn’t have feelings of enjoyment in his learning? The *Gemara* says that if a student didn’t see success after 5 years of learning, it is sign that he’s not seeing blessing in his learning. Did you try for 5 years to learn before you decided that you aren’t enjoying learning?

Compare this to a person who loses his appetite for food, so he decides not to eat anymore. Should he stop eating just because he doesn’t have an appetite...?

Q17: How does one learn with *iyun* (Gemara in-depth)?

A: What is your past? Did you learn in yeshiva? If you learned in yeshivah when you were younger, the way to learn with *iyun* is: Start from the *Gemara*, learn the *Rishonim* and the *Acharonim*, all the way until the latest *Acharonim*, and exert your mind in it.

I hope you don't think that I am someone who came down from Heaven to tell you unrealistic things. It is the truth, and it is *l'maaseh* (to be practiced). You just have to decide that this is what life is about, and that is what the entire issue revolves around.

Q18: Many people learn Gemara in-depth but they don't come to feel the closeness with Hashem that are described in these [Bilvavi] sefarim.

A: It is because those people only have Torah in their life, and no *avodas Hashem*. Torah without *avodas Hashem* doesn't lead to success, and neither does *avodas Hashem* without Torah.²⁹ We need both – we need both our “father” and our “mother”.

Is there anyone who has an easy time making a living? Well, why should Torah and Avodas Hashem come any easier to you? The Alter of Novhardok once said that if a person would try to establish a Yeshivah as much as when he tries to set up a living, he would be able to build 100 yeshivos. (He himself built many yeshivos.)

Torah and *avodas Hashem* doesn't come easy. But life is not easy. We have free will in how we will live our life and how we will use our energies. There is no such thing as anything successful that was easy. If a person uses his energies entirely for *parnassah*, he'll be wiped out by the time he opens up his *Gemara*. Not just with regards to having time for learning; he has used up all his soul's energies when it comes to work, so he won't be able to learn Torah properly.

But if one changes his perspective and decides that he will mainly channel his energies towards learning, he will be able to exert himself properly in Torah. Man has the power to choose between a life that contains real vitality to it, or to live a “dead” kind of life; it is written, “I have placed before you life and death, and you shall choose life.”

Q19: When it comes to making a living, I know how to set up a business and learn how to make it work. But when it comes to learning Torah in-depth, where do I begin? How should I devote my learning Torah time to learning with *iyun*, when I have very little basic knowledge of Torah and I haven't even gotten to the first step [just reading the Gemara and having a basic, simple understanding of it]?

A: Are you willing to pay someone to help you learn *Gemara b'iyun*?

Q20: Yes, I do have someone who teaches me how to learn *iyun*, but my *chavrusa* is way ahead of me; he understands it way better than me, and I see that he is enjoying his learning, but I don't have that enjoyment. Basically, there are people who are missing *hadrachah* (guidance) in learning, and they don't feel enjoyment and success in their learning.

A: If you will allow me, I will split up this question into different parts.

²⁹ Refer to *Tefillah* #050 – How Learning Gemara Bring You Closer To Hashem and *Tefillah* #107 – Balance In Your *Avodas Hashem*.

When it comes to “knowing how to learn”, generally, if someone didn’t learn in Yeshiva and he wants to know how to learn, he should hire an avreich to pay him and be his personal trainer to teach him to how learn.

After doing that, if someone wants to taste enjoyment in his learning, there is one secret he should know: besides for exerting ourselves in Torah, we must cry to Hashem for success. If you cry earnestly to Hashem, you are guaranteed success.

Q21: If I have 2 hours a day to myself, should part of it be spent learning Gemara, and the other part of it should be spent learning a sefer? Or should part of it be spent taking a walk in hisbodedus and asking Hashem “Please help me”, and the other part of the time should be spent in Gemara, and another part of the time should be spent on learning sefarim?

A: What is your goal? Where do you want to get to in your life?

Q22: I don’t even know what my goal is and where I am supposed to get to. But I still yearn to be close to Hashem.

A: Do you want to be in Gan Eden, or in *Gehinnom*...? What will you do in Gan Eden? In Gan Eden, there is only Torah learning going on, for 24 hours a day. If you don’t gain an enjoyment in your learning already on This World, what will you do there? There is just 24 hours of learning there; no sleep, no work; what will you do? If a person doesn’t have enjoyment in his learning, for what purpose does he live for...?

Q23: If I feel more sippuk (fulfillment) when I just read through many pages of Gemara and reviewing them (Bekius), or to learn Mishnayos, or to keep reviewing a certain Masechta - is that also a proper way to get a deep bond with Hashem, just as much as a person who learns b’iyun? After all, there are people who learn Gemara b’iyun and they don’t cover enough ground; they spend half a year on 5 pages of Gemara, and they don’t feel fulfillment from this kind of learning!

A: Imagine if a person only gets married to a woman so that he can have children - he didn’t want a wife, he just wanted children...The Torah is not just a tool you use to get to Hashem – it is also a goal unto itself. Therefore, one who only learns *bekiyus* (a quick reading of the *Gemara*, where you can cover more pages of *Gemara*) won’t be able to gain a connection with the Torah.

A person should learn both *iyun* and *bekiyus*, but not only *bekiyus*. The deep connection with Torah is gained only through learning with *iyun*.

Q24: We work. We don’t have 3 hours a time to learn Gemara with iyun; we only have an hour before *davening*, and an hour at night.

A: Are in you in a jail...?

Q25: Is it still effective to learn Gemara for 3 hours a day in-depth, even if it’s not 3 hours in a row?

A: It's better to have 3 consecutive hours of learning in-depth, but even if it's not consecutive, it's still better than nothing.

Q26: But I don't even have 3 hours at all. I only have one hour before *davening* and one hour at night, so I don't have the time to get into the Gemara properly.

A: For what purpose is our life for...?

Q27: I am not yet actually on the level of accepting that my life is only about wanting what Hashem wants and to only learn Torah, and not have to any of my own personal *retzonos*. But I still want to be in such a situation in which I can earn a living yet also be close to Hashem, to do Hashem's will and to learn Torah.

A: When I came here to speak, I didn't dream for one second that anyone here would accept the words here 100% and be willing to totally change over. So what did I come here for and speak? It is because once in your life, you should hear the truth. Also, if you can actualize the words here even 10% (and even that I'm not expecting), then even that would be a big shift towards the right direction.

Q28: I understand that most of one's time to himself should be spend on learning Gemara b'iyun (and the remaining extra time should be spent on Halacha and on learning about Avodas Hashem), but still, even if I know what I have to do and I am actually doing that, I am not yet feeling a connection with Hashem through learning.

A: If you just close your *Gemara* at the end your learning session and you come back the next day to your *Gemara* to get back into it again, then I agree with you that you won't find learning *Gemara* enjoyable. You keep splitting apart your learning, and there is a constant interruption in your learning like this, because in the way you are going about your learning, you never think about what you're learning throughout the course of the day.

Instead, prepare for yourself a question in your learning to think about during the day – for example, throughout the day, contemplate something you learned about in the *Gemara*. This will give you a taste of enjoyment in your learning.

Experience with this shows that it is a tried and tested solution to give you enjoyment in learning.

There are other methods of advice too which can help you, but the question one must first ask himself is: if he's willing to even start.

Q29: Isn't there such a thing as Yissocher and Zevulun, that Zevulun goes to work so he can support Yissocher's learning? So why can't we be like Zevulun, and our purpose in life is to perhaps work so we can support others' learning? Perhaps that is my *tafkid* (role) in life?

A: Reichman (the famous wealthy supporter of yeshivos), once asked Rav Shach, "Who has more Olam HaBa, me or you? I uphold the entire world of Torah, while the Rosh Yeshivah teaches the Torah." Rav Shach responded, "I don't know which of us has more Olam HaBa. That, only

Hashem knows. But one thing I know for sure: I do enjoy This World, because I learn Torah and teach it my whole life, but you don't have real enjoyment on This World at all."

Once I met a person who works for many hours a day, and I asked him, "Why do you work for so many hours a day?" He told me, "Because I want to be able to have a lot of money to give tzedakah with." I said to him, "Why didn't the Chofetz Chaim think of that too? Why didn't he go to work so he could give tzedakah?"

I'll tell you another story. There was a student of Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, a great Rosh Yeshivah in Eretz Yisrael. (As a side note, if you want to know how learn b'iyun, look at his sefarim, which are called "*Shaarei Shemuos*"). One of his students learned by him in Yeshivas Beer Yaakov, and then he moved to America. He was learning for a few years and then he felt he had to go stop learning and go to work. He called Rav Shapiro and asked him if the Rosh Yeshivah agrees with his decision. Rav Shapiro said to him, "Absolutely not. There is nothing to discuss."

Rav Shapiro is one of the people in the generation who knows how to do the *Goral HaGra* (a mystical tradition on how to search for an answer to problems by opening up a special kind of Chumash). He only did the *Goral HaGra* for communal purposes, and he would never use it for private issues of people who came to him. The student asked Rav Shapiro if he could make an exception for him and perform a *Goral HaGra* for him to let him know if he should continue to sit and learn or instead go to work. Rav Shapiro responded that he only uses the *Goral HaGra* for communal issues, not for personal issues of an individual.

Rav Shapiro was the fundraiser for the Yeshivah for half of the year (and Rav Wolbe took him over for the other half of the year); when he came to America to collect for his yeshivah, the student came to him and told him, "Now that I'm driving the Rosh Yeshivah around and enabling him to collect money, I should have the status of a community, not an individual."

In the end, Rav Shapiro agreed to make for him a *Goral HaGra*. He opened up the *Chumash* and the possuk said, "For six days you shall work, and on the seventh day, you shall rest." It sounded like the *Goral* was saying that he should go to work. But that's because this person wanted to go work! *Chazal* say: "In the way a person wants go in, he is led."

If Eliyahu HaNavi comes and tells you that your soul is from the tribe of Zevulun, you can act like a Zevulun. [Otherwise, you can't assume that your tafkid is to be like a Zevulun].

Q30: It's not that I want to go to work; I just want to know, how do I know that my tafkid in life is to be like Yissocher? Maybe my tafkid is to be like a Zevulun.

A: I don't mean you personally. I didn't mean to address you on a personal level. My answers are not directed at anyone personally; they are general answers which describe a concept. The questions I ask here are also not directed at anyone here personally, and neither are my answers to each person here meant to address anyone on a personal level.

Q32: The Rav spoke about nullifying our *ratzon* (will)³⁰. But if a person is a Baal Teshuvah and he has changed so much, and he has given up so much already in his life, why must he suppress himself even more and give up his permitted desires?

A: Just do three things each day against your *ratzon*.

Q33: But why should we restrain ourselves from giving in to small desires, when we've already changed so much already by becoming a Baal Teshuvah? Isn't a Baal Teshuvah clearly doing Hashem's will already? Why should he restrain himself from small permitted desires? Why is it important? Before a person is a Baal Teshuvah, he wasn't doing anything according to Hashem's will; now that he is a Baal Teshuvah, he is clearly doing Hashem's will all the time, so why is it necessary for him to hold back from small *retzonos* – why is this needed?

A: When young people eat things that are not healthy, and when people get a bit older, they begin to worry about their health. Why do people become health-conscious? Isn't it permitted to eat those foods...?

Q34: But why is there an *avodah* to restrain ourselves from permitted desires, if there is nothing forbidden with giving in to permissible desires?

A: Your question is spelled out clearly in *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*: If it's permitted according to the Torah, why is it that *tzaddikim* abstain from permitted desires? And if it is considered bad and forbidden, so then why don't all people avoid it? The answer is that there are things which are forbidden to all people, and there are other things which are forbidden depending on the level one has reached. The more a person is advancing in his spiritual growth and he wants to improve, it is upon him to practice restraint from even permitted desires.

³⁰ As described in "Bilvavi" Part 4 (Chapters 15-21).

1.8 | *Simanim Of Rosh HaShanah*³¹

Introduction

With *siyata d'shamaya* (Heavenly assistance) we will speak a bit about the day of *Rosh HaShanah*.

The *Gemara*³² states, “One should be accustomed to eat in the beginning of the year [*Rosh HaShanah*] *kara* (gourd), *rubya*, *kartis*, *silka* and *tamri* (dates). The *Tur*³³ cites additional foods as *simanim*, but in the actual words of the *Gemara* in front of us, it is these five foods that are mentioned.

The *Gemara* elsewhere³⁴ does not say that one should eat these foods, but instead to look at them. So there are two differing opinions in the *Gemara*: If we need to eat these foods on Rosh Hashanah, or if we should look at them.

First we will define what the concept of *simanim* is, and then we will go through the particular *simanim* that we eat, in-depth.

Simanim: Revealing The Hidden Essence of Something

A *siman* is a symbol of the essence of something. When something isn't openly revealed to our eyes, it needs a *siman* so that we can know it exists. The *siman* of something is how we can become aware that the something exists; it draws the Heavenly essence behind the matter onto This World so that we can see it.

The *Acharonim* (later scholars) dispute about what the *tefillos* are that we say by the *simanim*. The *Avudraham* understands that the prayers we say before we eat the *simanim* are a prayer to merit a good judgment, while the *Chochmas Shlomo* is of the opinion that it is not a *tefillah*, rather, because we have *bitachon* (faith) that we will merit a good judgment. Either way, the *simanim* represent something that we cannot see here on this world, and we can draw down their Heavenly essence to this world through the *simanim*.

This concept, that a concept is hidden from our view but we can still draw it down from Heaven, is really the concept behind death. We will explain.

Rosh Hashanah is about both life and death, for the “book of the living” and the “book of the dead” are open on Rosh Hashanah. Had Adam eaten from the *Eitz HaChaim*, there would be only

³¹ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/rosh-hashannah-060-depth-simanim>

³² *Kereisos 6a*

³³ *Tur Orach Chaim: 583: 1*

³⁴ *Horayos 12a*

life, but when Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, death came to the world. He connected himself to death ever since then. In other words, the real life is hidden from us in our current state, so we do not have the essence of life in our current state. But we have a *siman* that can awaken to us what the essence of life is.

Siman is from the word *sam*, poison. When *simanim* are used for a holy purpose, there is *simana milsa hi*, “A *siman* is regarded”. When the evil of the *sam* in the *siman* is removed, through using it as a *siman*, the evil of *siman/sam* becomes rectified, where it becomes “*simana milsa hi*.”

Siman As A Means For Finding A Lost Object

Until now we explained one use of a *siman*, which is when something is hidden and we need some way of reminding ourselves that a concept exists.

But there is also a kind of *siman* because it has become lost and the *siman* can help us find it again, because a lost object is recognizable if it has a *siman* on it. What is the deeper meaning behind this kind of *siman*?

The *simanim* on *Rosh HaShanah* are either eaten or they are seen, as we brought earlier. Chavah saw the *Eitz HaDaas* and she ate from it. Thus, eating or seeing the *simanim* of *Rosh HaShanah* is what rectifies the sin of Chavah when she saw and then ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*. There were two parts to the sin: Seeing the *Eitz HaDaas*, and eating of it.

Rashi says that some of the foods we eat on *Rosh HaShanah* are foods that grow quickly and some are foods that are sweet [because they grow slowly]. Why do we eat foods that grow quickly? The simple understanding is that it symbolizes how we should merit to quickly grow in our spirituality. This is understandable according to the opinion that the *simanim* are *tefillos*, we eat them to get the merits and thus increase our spiritual level.

However, according to the other opinion that the *simanim* are an expression of our *bitachon*, why do we eat foods that grow quickly?

The *Eitz HaDaas* was an unripe fruit. The way this is rectified is by eating fruit on *Rosh Hashanah* that grows quickly, which is reminiscent of the unripe fruit of the *Eitz HaDaas*.

Chazal state that in the future, women will give birth the day they conceive. The depth of this is because it will rectify the first evil of eating fruit that grew quickly and was unripe. By the *Eitz HaDaas*, it was an evil kind of quick growth, thus it was unripe. In the future, when women give birth right away, there will be quick growth, but it will be ripe results.

Elevating The Mundane

There is a deeper meaning as well to why we eat foods on *Rosh HaShanah* that grow quickly.

The above-quoted *Gemara* says to eat *rubya*, and Rashi³⁵ translates this as “*tiltan*.” Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l was asked that the *Gemara* mentions elsewhere that *tiltan* is a kind of animal food; if so, how could it be that on *Rosh HaShanah* we should eat animal food? Isn’t this a bad *siman*?

First we need to define what it is, and then we can understand.

The *simanim* we eat on *Rosh Hashanah* are not just because of their Heavenly essence that they represent. It is more than that – it is to take something mundane and reveal how they are spiritual. So when we eat *rubya*, which is animal food, a mundane kind of food, that is precisely how we sanctify animal food - by using it for a spiritual purpose.

Why Kara and Rubya Are Eaten Together

Based upon the above, now we can also understand the depth of why we eat *kara*.

Rashi says that *kara* is called *dalaas* (gourd). This is mainly food fit for human consumption, but the Mishnah elsewhere says the animals also eat *dalaas*.³⁶ Thus, *rubya* represents how we sanctify animal food; how do we sanctify it? We sanctify it by eating *dalaas*, which raises it from the level of animal food to human food. *Rubya\tiltan* is mainly animal food; through eating *kara\dalaas* and *rubya* together, we raise animal food to the level of human food.

Beinonim: Going From The Level of Servant To The Level of Son

Avraham told Eliezer, “*Stay here with the donkey*”, and *Chazal* expound to this to mean that he was telling him, “You are a nation that is like a donkey”. In other words, Eliezer was his slave, and a slave lowers himself from the level of a human to an animal.

On *Rosh HaShanah* we say, “*Whether we are like children, whether we are like servants, have mercy on us.*” These are two sides to the coin: either we are a son, or we are a servant. For every two sides, there is always a middle point that connects them, so there are really three groups of people. On one side there are the *tzaddikim*, who are like children to Hashem. There are the wicked on the other side, who are like servants to Hashem. The middle group is the *beinonim*, who are on the level between *tzaddikim* and the wicked.

Beinoni has the same numerical value in Hebrew as 128; when the words *ben* and *eved* are added together, it also adds up to 128. The *beinoni* is between the *ben* and the *eved*. An *eved* goes out to freedom either when his tooth or eye is removed. A person eats with his tooth and sees with his eye – the depth of this, is that a person goes out of exile when he rectifies his eating and his vision.

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ *End of Tractate Shabbos*

Thus, a person either sees or eats the *simanim* on *Rosh HaShanah*, so that he can leave the level of *eved* and go to the level of *ben*. An *eved* goes out through either tooth or eye; therefore a person should eat the *simanim* because that is how he goes free with his tooth, and he should see them so that he can go free through his eye.

But there is a deeper understanding a well.

The words *eved* and *ben* combine for a total Hebrew numerical value of 128, which is also the value of the word *beinoni*. If the word *beinoni* is added to both *eved* and *ben*, it is 128 plus 128, which equals 256, equal to the numerical value of the word “Aharon”. Aharon was the one who loved peace and pursued peace and thereby brought people closer to the Torah. His whole essence was to serve as the intermediary and attach the wicked to the righteous. He brought together husband and wife, and he brought together one to another. Aharon is the one who connects that which has been separated: he represents a *beinoni*, the connecting point between the righteous and the wicked. A *beinoni* connects the levels of *ben* and *eved* together.

Kara\Dalaas: Either A Deadly Poison or Life-Giving

Kara is *dalaas*, which can be rearranged as the word *la-daas*, to know – a hint to the root of the sin with the *Eitz HaDaas*, for there was a desire to know of the *Eitz HaDaas*. It can also be read *dal es*, to take away time – because as a result of eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*, death came to the world; the time of man’s life was cut short.

The *Gemara*³⁷ lists a few kinds of *dalaas*. What kind of *dalaas* do we eat on Rosh Hashanah? The *Gemara*³⁸ describes *dalaas yevonis*, “Greek *dalaas*”, which is called a prominent kind of *dalaas*. The *Gemara* elsewhere describes a kind of *dalaas* that is used for vinegar, and this represents a kind of *dalaas* that is destroyed so that it can be used for something else; this is the lowest use of *dalaas*. There is regular *dalaas*, there is Greek *dalaas*, which is prominent *dalaas*, and there is unimportant *dalaas*.

Thus, the *avodah* of eating *dalaas* is to take ordinary *dalaas* on *Rosh HaShanah* and elevate it to the level of prominent *dalaas*.

The *Gemara*³⁹ says that *kara* was once brought into one the Sages’ homes, and the Sage said, “Remove the angel of death from this house!” The *Gemara* explains that *dalaas* can sometimes harm an ill person or heal him. Another opinion in the *Gemara* is that it depends how the *dalaas* is eaten; if it is eaten by itself, it is deadly to an ill person, but if it is eaten as together with other herbs, then it heals. From here we see that *dalaas* can be deadly poison.

³⁷ In Tractate Nedarim

³⁸ Beitzah 3a

³⁹ Nedarim 49a

The way we elevate *dalaas* on *Rosh HaShanah* is to go from *eved* to *ben*. On *Rosh HaShanah* we declare *Malchiyos*; we elevate *eved* to *ben*. *Dalaas* symbolizes how we must elevate our level, to declare Hashem as King over us.

Rosh HaShanah is from the word *rosh*, the head. *Dalaas* is to elevate; we elevate ourselves to declare the King. The highest point of the king is the crown, which is on the head. So too, in time, the *malchus* (kingship) in time is by the head of time, which is *Rosh HaShanah*.

The *Gemara*⁴⁰ discusses an animal whose head was severed, and it was given surgery and lived after that. What did they do to it? Rashi says that they chopped dry *dalaas* and used it to glue the animal's head back to the body. Usually the rule of the *Gemara* is that "a *treifah* (dying animal) cannot live," but this animal was an exception to the rule; it became a *treifah* and lived afterwards, when they glued its head back together, through *dalaas*. So *dalaas* can connect something that was previously dead back to the head, where it then can be alive.

We find this idea illustrated by a statement of Reb Pinchos Koritzer zt"l, that a person should be cautious not to think any evil thoughts on *Rosh HaShanah*, because those thoughts will carry over into the rest of the year, being that *Rosh HaShanah* is the head of the year, and the head drags everything else with it.

The Beinoni By Neilah Can Open Up A New Gate

Rosh HaShanah is when we are all written in either the book of life or the book of death, depending on if we are righteous or wicked. A *beinoni*, who is the connecting point between the righteous and the wicked, can be elevated to the level of the righteous, but he can also uplift the wicked with him.

The time of *Neilah* is called the "closing of the gates", as we say be *Neilah*: "Open up for us at the time of the closing of the gates." A gate is also called *deles*, which has the same letters as the word *dalaas*, hinting to how the *beinonim* (represented by the *dalaas*) at that time can connect himself to the level of the righteous and uplift the wicked. The *beinoni* opens a new door by *Neilah* and enables even the wicked to be uplifted then.

The Depth Behind Dipping The Apple In The Honey

The *Gemara* lists five *simanim* to eat, but as we know from *Shulchan Aruch* and as almost every Jew in the world does, we dip the apple in the honey. There are many reasons given for why we dip specifically an apple.

⁴⁰ In *Chullin*, Chapter "Eilu Treifos."

Apple in Hebrew is “*tapuach*”, from the word “*pesach*”, opening. We will soon explain the connection.

The first *siman* listed in the *Gemara* is *kara* (or *dalaas*), thus, since *kara* is the first *siman* listed (although we don’t have the custom nowadays to eat it first), all the other *simanim* are headed by *kara/dalaas*. *Kara/dalaas* is essentially the “door” to all the other *simanim*. Thus, we eat an apple, which is *tapuach*, related to the word *patuach*, to “open” the doors. And, we dip it in honey, which “sweetens” what goes on by the “door”. The deep implication of this is that the sweetness of the honey is what removes the “closed” doors, and allows for an “opened” door.

Yaakov left the room of Yitzchok by the blessing at the same time that Esav entered. They miraculously did not each meet each other. The depth of this is because when the “doors” are “opened”, nothing can clash. Esav is called *ish seir*, a hairy man, because he represents hair, and hair is above the head, which hints to how he is like a removed head; a removed head symbolizes death, so Esav is like the hair, removed from his head, dead. Meeting with Esav is like meeting up with death, but when there is an “opened door”, symbolized by the *dalaas/deles*, nothing is closed.

[That is the message behind the *dalaas*, which is related the word *deles*, door – to show us that there is a new door being opened, all that was closed has been opened for us, and the opportunities are thus endless. This level will be fully revealed in the future. As for us who live in the current era, the *dalaas* reminds us that we can open for ourselves a new door.]

There is a door that can lead to the palace or a hallway, but the door that leads to the King is unlimited, because the King is unlimited in His power (“A king breaks fences”). When the *malchus* (kingship) of Hashem will be totally revealed in the future, it will be revealed that His *malchus* is unlimited; it will be an opening that has no end, no closing to it.

In the current *Rosh HaShanah* we are in, all is written and decreed; the year is sealed for a person. But when the “doors” get “opened” in the future, all seals will be torn, because there will be the revelation of the Endless, which is the eternal life that was contained in the *Eitz HaChaim*.

Conclusion

Thus, *kara/dalaas* is the first of the listed *simanim* on *Rosh HaShanah*, and it represents the entire depth to how we elevate ourselves on *Rosh HaShanah* from a lower level to a higher level, that “we should be as a head, and not as a tail”.

The main *avodah* of *Rosh HaShanah* is *malchiyos*, that the kingship of Hashem be declared by us upon ourselves, and it is represented by the *siman* of *dalaas*, which is how we elevate ourselves from the lower level to the higher level.

1.9 | Motivations In Prayer On Rosh HaShanah⁴¹

Rachamim\Mercy and Ratzon\The Will of Hashem

The blessing of שמע קולינו continues with the prayer of וקבל ברחמים וברצון את תפילותינו - We ask Hashem that He accept our prayers, and that He accept them with His mercy (*rachamim*) and with His will (*ratzon*).

Hashem has mercy on us like a Father, as we say in the *Selichos* - “*Kiracheim av al banim*” – “as the mercy of a father on his children”. We ask Hashem in this prayer of Shemoneh Esrei that Hashem should have mercy on us and accept our prayers. But we also ask here that our prayers be accepted with His *ratzon* – that He should answer us according to His will.

The simple meaning of this prayer is as follows. If a child asks something for his father, and the father knows that it’s not good for the child, he refuses his child’s request; but if the child cries to his father and begs him, he awakens the father’s compassion, and the father will give in to the child, because his compassion for his child has been greatly aroused. He’ll give his child what the child wants even though he knows that it’s not good to give in to his child’s request, simply because he has mercy on his child.

Hashem knows what is good for us, and that is why he doesn’t always answer our requests, because what we think is good for us might not actually be good for us. But when we pray to Hashem and we beg Him to answer our request, we awaken His Fatherly mercy to give us what we want. But it still might not be according to Hashem’s will, for Hashem knows that it’s not good for us if we will get our request answered. There was *rachamim* (mercy) here, but there was no *ratzon* (will of Hashem) yet.

Chazal say that “In the way a person wants to go in, he is led”, as we see from Bilaam, who prayed for something evil, and Hashem let him be answered. When a person wants something very badly and he pursues it, he is assisted by Heaven to get to his goals – for good or for bad. Therefore, the fact that our prayers are answered doesn’t always mean it’s good for us, because maybe Hashem is letting us have our way, and that way is really bad for us.

Thus, we don’t just ask Hashem to have *rachamim*\mercy on us to answer our prayers; we ask that they be accepted with *ratzon*, according to His will. We *daven* specially that not only should Hashem have *rachamim*\mercy on us by answering our prayers, but that He should agree to give us what we want, that it should be according to His *ratzon*, and not merely that He is letting us having our way. We don’t want to be among those of whom it is said, “In the way a person wants to go in, he is led”; rather, we want to arouse Hashem’s will in answering our requests, so that our requests are not just being answered because Hashem is having mercy on us (because then it might not be good

⁴¹ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-134-motivations-prayer-rosh-hashanah>

for us if we get answered) but because the answer to our request is totally according to Hashem's will.

We are basically asking Hashem here to answer our requests only if it's according to His will that we be answered, and if not, then we don't want our request to be answered.

Davening During Elul

Let us reflect more into what prayer is, especially what we pray for during Elul, in which people pray for many requests. We ask Hashem during these days for forgiveness, but at the same time, we all want a good year, and that our requests be answered.

We will examine if our prayers that we ask for are turning to either Hashem's *rachamim*, or to His *ratzon*.

Four Reasons Why We Need To Daven

One of the three pillars of the world, Chazal say, is *tefillah*, prayer. The question is: Why do we *daven*? Hashem knows what is best for us, so why should we *daven*? If it is good for us to be answered we will get what we want, and if it is bad we won't get what we want - so why do we *daven*, if everything that is supposed to come to us will come to us anyway? There are many answers that our Sages gave.

1) One answer is based on what we spoke of earlier, that Hashem has a *middas harachamim* (trait of mercy). Therefore, even if Hashem knows that something is not good for a person, still, if one *davens* to Hashem for something, he awakens the mercy of a Father that Hashem has, so Hashem might give the person what he *davens* for, even though it's not good for him, because His mercy has been aroused. A father also gives into his child's request for a treat when his mercy for the child is aroused, even though it's not good for the child to have the treat, because it's unhealthy; his natural compassion for his child has overcome his logic, when his child begs him to answer his wish. So too, Hashem acts like a merciful Father; when His mercy is aroused because we are requesting something, He will give it to us even if it's not good for us.

According to this approach, the reason why we *daven* is because we are really undeserving, to our sins; but through prayer, we awaken Hashem's *middas harachamim* and He gives us what we want even though we are really undeserving.

2) Another answer that our Sages give is because sometimes there are decrees upon a person which are preventing him from receiving what he is supposed to get from Hashem. But through the power of prayer, the barriers can be removed, and he can then receive what he is supposed to get. It is also brought by the Sages that the power of *Pesukei D'Zimra* can remove the barriers that are preventing Heavenly sustenance from reaching a person.

3) Another reason our Sages give is because Hashem desires our prayers; it is written, “Let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet.” Therefore, even when we are deserving, Hashem places us in situations or predicaments that will cause us to *daven* to Him. Hashem therefore built it into the system of Creation that we need to *daven* in order to get things, not because of sins or because of anything holding us back, but simply because Hashem desires the prayers of a Jew (the Sages state “Hashem desires the prayers of the righteous”), so that we will get everything only when we *daven*. According to this approach, prayer is part of the design of Creation: nothing can come to us unless we *daven* for it, even if we are deserving.

4) There is yet a deeper reason why we must *daven*. When we start Shemoneh Esrei, we first request, “Hashem, open my lips.” We are not just asking Hashem that our lips become opened; we are asking Hashem that the *Shechinah* should speak from our throats. Of Moshe it was said, “The *Shechinah* spoke from his throat.” In our soul, there is a ‘Moshe Rabbeinu within’, a power to talk to Hashem from the *Shechinah* that resides deep in our soul. This is a very deep matter, and it is only being mentioned here so that we can complete the picture of the discussion here.

The Question To Ask Yourself Before You Formulate A Request To Hashem

We will reflect a little on the following. Every person who is about to *daven* and make a request from Hashem must realize why he is *davening*: “Am I *davening* to Hashem to awaken His *rachamim* - or His *ratzon*?”

There is a method brought which serves as a litmus test in how one can know this: Would the person continue to want something if Hashem would decree that it’s not according to the *Ratzon* Hashem? Or would the person be willing to nullify his *ratzon* to Hashem if Hashem doesn’t want him to be answered?

This is the question one needs to ask himself.

Without the above awareness, a person will simply *daven* for his needs (health, livelihood, nachas, shidduchim, or success in spiritual matters) and he never clarifies to himself if he is prepared to accept Hashem’s refusal.

One must check deeply into his soul and ask himself what his motivations are: Would I still want my request to be answered if Hashem wouldn’t want me to be answered (even if He gives me what I ask for)? Or would I still be able to surrender my *ratzon* if I know that what I want is not Hashem’s *ratzon*...?

If one can accept Hashem saying No to him, then such a person is *davening* with the proper perspective, from his deep *emunah*, from *bittul* (nullification) of his *ratzon*.

Thus, we should only want Hashem’s *rachamim* on us if it will lead to His *ratzon* – and not a *rachamim* that doesn’t lead to Hashem’s *ratzon*.

This is a question one must always ask himself before he *davens* for something, but it is especially relevant during these days of *Selichos*, in which we *daven* to Hashem for many requests.

There are many, many private requests that people *daven* for on Rosh HaShanah. When you *daven* for anything from Hashem, whether it is health, livelihood, a *shidduch*, *nachas* from your children - you should first clarify to yourself: Am I davening for these things only on condition that Hashem wants me to have these things? If Hashem doesn't want me to be answered, would I still want to be answered? Or would I still continue to want what I'm *davening* for, even if Hashem doesn't want...?

The Sages state that we are called the "children of Hashem" whether we do the will of Hashem or not. Doing "the will of Hashem" means that when we pray, we only want to be answered if Hashem agrees, but if Hashem doesn't want to answer our requests, we are prepared to surrender our will.

This is the question one needs to ask himself: If it's not the *ratzon* Hashem for me to be answered, would I still want to be answered?

The Things That You Really, Really, Really Want...

When a person makes this inner clarification, he will discover that there is a great struggle inside himself about the things he wants. We all have many, many things we want; that is the way we are. There are some things we can easily forego if we know that Hashem doesn't want us to have those things, because the truth is, we don't really want those things so badly.

For example, if a person isn't sure if the right yeshivah is good for him or not, it's easier for him to *daven* to Hashem and say to Hashem, "Hashem, if it's good for me to go to this yeshivah, then let it happen, and if it is not good for me, then don't let it happen." Here it's easy to nullify our will, because we don't want it that badly.

But let's say it's a yeshivah that a person really wants to get into very badly. Then, he talks to Hashem differently: "Hashem, I want so badly to get into this yeshivah – please let it happen!" In such a case, a person is apt to be very stubborn about what he wants, and he will not be prepared so easily to accept a No from Hashem. Or, a person wants a certain shidduch very badly, or he wants to get a certain job very badly; he will stubbornly persist in his prayers about what he wants, and he is not ready to surrender his will to Hashem if the answer is No.

(There are many other such situations as well.)

The Two Parts Inside Us When We Daven

So we must become aware that there are two parts in us when we *daven*: a part in us that is ready to forego what we want (which shows that we don't want those things so badly), and a part in us

which is not ready to give up what we want (because those things are apparently what we want very badly).

These are two parts in us; we are not entirely nullified to Hashem, nor are we entirely stubborn towards Hashem. Rather, there is a part in us which can nullify itself to Hashem, and there is also a part in us which doesn't want to nullify itself to Hashem.

All of us, without exception, have these two parts in ourselves.

We all have a part in us which says, "Even if Hashem doesn't want me to be answered, I still want it!" Why? It is because it is written, "*There is no righteous person on the earth who does not sin*" - in other words, we all have a part in us which wants the opposite of Hashem's will, in wanting certain things even if Hashem wouldn't want us to have those things. Simply, it is used to rebel and commit a sin, *rachmana litzlan*; but it is also present in some subtle way as we pray – a part in us wants something even when Hashem doesn't want it.

There is actually a middle point between these two parts of our soul, which consciously recognizes that it is not on the level of total nullification to Hashem, yet it is not does desire either to go against Hashem's will. We can use this part of the soul to *daven* to Hashem in our requests to ask for Hashem's *rachamim* with the aspiration that we should ask Hashem to be answered only if it His *ratzon*.

This is the depth of our prayer of **וקבל ברחמים וברצון** – we are asking Hashem that even though we are not yet on the level of totally giving up our will for Hashem, we are asking that He should help us be able to nullify our will to Him and thereby only ask Him for things that are according to His will.

Knowing Your Actual Level and Aspiring For Higher Levels

A person cannot be on the higher level (of only asking Hashem to answer him if it's according to His *ratzon* and if not, he doesn't want to be answered) if he's not yet actually there yet. But through prayer that we reach such a level, we can get there.

Tefillah reveals what's on our heart. *Tefillah* is not an intellectual matter; it is a heart matter, for it is "avodah of the heart". Thus, just because a person absorbs this concept intellectually, that doesn't mean he's on the level yet of *davening* to Hashem only if it's His *ratzon*. If his heart hasn't come to terms with this concept, he won't be able to aspire for such a level, because it is only something that his intellect knows about. It is not a *tefillah* that's coming from his heart. One therefore must be aware if his heart has come to terms with this intellectual awareness about *tefillah*.

We must know where our heart is at. Chazal even speak of a person who desires to sin and then *davens* to Hashem help him! This is the evil use of the power of prayer, in which a person prays for something against Hashem's will. Besides for the case of sin, even if it's not something evil such as when we *daven* for something we want, there is also this concept of wanting something that's against

Hashem's will. *Tefillah* is avodah of the heart, and not everyone's heart is ready to accept that we must *daven* to Hashem only for *ratzon* and not just for His *rachamim*.

Thus, practically speaking, if a person is not yet on the level of accepting this, he should not *daven* to Hashem in his requests that he be answered only according to His *ratzon*, because since his heart is not matching the words coming out of his mouth, he should not fool himself.

The more a person has better self-awareness and he realizes what level his heart is at, he realizes there is a part in himself which doesn't want to be nullified and a part which doesn't want to be nullified, as well as a middle part of himself which wishes to leave the lower level and ascend to the higher level.

Although one should aspire to reach the higher level and try to be less involved with the lower level, the practical avodah is that one should *daven* with proper self-awareness and thus *daven* from the level he is currently at.

Is Rosh HaShanah About Hashem, Or Is It About My Needs?

The depth behind this is as follows. There is an argument amongst the works of our earlier Rabbis about how a person should *daven* in Elul and especially during Rosh HaShanah, if a person may *daven* for private requests or not, since Rosh HaShanah is about davening for the **malchiyos**, the revelation of Hashem's kingship over the world. There were those who were of the view that *davening* for their private requests is a self-absorbed perspective, so they held it was not suitable to pray for oneself during Elul and Rosh HaShanah.

Reb Yisrael Salanter zt"l pointed out, though, that it depends the actual level that a person is holding at. If a person is not yet on the level of only being concerned for *Malchiyos*, he cannot identify with the pain of the *Shechinah* (the lack of feeling revelation of Hashem's Presence in the world), then he should not focus his prayers on the revelation of *Shechinah*, and instead, he should *daven* on Rosh HaShanah for his needs.

So although the purpose of the *avodah* of Rosh Hashanah is *Malchiyos*, and not *Zichronos* and *Shofaros* (which awaken our merits so we can have a good year), that is not all there is to Rosh HaShanah. There is the *avodah* of *Malchiyos*, which is to pray for the revelation of Hashem upon the world, and this prayer emanates from our *lishmah* (altruistic) aspect. But there is another *avodah* of Rosh HaShanah – to have *Zichronos* and *Shofaros*, which is that we should have a good year. The goal is of course *Malchiyos*, but practically speaking, the level of most people does not totally yearn for *Malchiyos*. People have things they need and want from Hashem, and they are not ready to totally surrender their will to Hashem and just be altruistic.

So if one is not yet on the level of yearning for *Malchiyos*, although he should definitely try to awaken a yearning for *Malchiyos* on Rosh HaShanah as he *davens* for it (as Chazal established), he also has to be aware that since he's not yet on that level, he can aspire for it, but he should know that he is not yet there.

Only a few individuals transform totally on Rosh HaShanah and they leave their self behind, becoming totally altruistic, like Reb Elazar Ben Dordaya, who attained his share in the World To Come in his moment of truth. But almost all people, without exception, are not on that level; a person serves Hashem according to his current level that he has reached.

Of course, there is a great spiritual light during Elul and Rosh HaShanah; we all get inspired, both from our external surroundings as well as from the inner spiritual light that is found in these days. Therefore, Reb Yisrael Salanter said, since this is the level that most people are at, we must *daven* for our own private requests, because that is a more honest approach to ourselves. If we would *daven* entirely for *Malchiyos* and not for ourselves, it would be superficial lip service, because our heart isn't matching that level. It wouldn't be truthful.

This doesn't mean to imply that we shouldn't have aspirations. We need to aspire to accept upon ourselves Hashem's Kingship, and we must aspire to reach the level in which we ask things from Hashem only if it will be according to His *ratzon*. But in the practical sense, we must know where we are actually holding, and that being the case, we know that we are mainly concerned for Hashem's *rachamim*, not His *ratzon* and not His *malchus*. We must be honest with ourselves, while at the same time aspiring for the higher levels.

However, it should certainly bother us that we aren't yet on the higher level. It should feel painful to us, and it should not just be an aspiration for *Malchiyos*; it must really bother us that we aren't truthful enough to be on that level. So don't become complacent with your current level and say, "That's the reality. I have aspirations, but *l'maaseh* (practically speaking), I'm not holding there." That should not be the attitude. Rather, it should bother you why you are not yet on that truthful level of aspiring only for *Malchiyos*.

The truth is that the wish for *Malchiyos* is really the nature of our soul, but that nature is very covered over from us. Since *Malchiyos* is the purpose of our avodah, it should feel painful to us that we are not mainly concerned with our purpose.

Rosh HaShanah is mainly about *Malchiyos*, but to our chagrin, most of us are not mainly concerned about restoring the *malchus* (kingship) of Hashem to the world. On one hand, we must realize that this is the level we are at, so we should not fool ourselves by thinking that we really do want it so badly. Therefore, Reb Yisrael Salanter said that our practical avodah is to *daven* for our needs on Rosh HaShanah. But on the other hand, it should still bother you that you are not that concerned about *Malchiyos*, the purpose of Rosh HaShanah. If it bothers you, you will at least be somewhat connected to that level.

We explained earlier that the desire in a person to want something even when Hashem doesn't want it is something that stems from the unrefined part of our soul which goes against Hashem's will. This should also bother us – it should bother us that we mainly *daven* to Hashem from that place in ourselves, a part of us that is not ready to surrender to Hashem's will. It can bother us because there is an indeed a point of truth in our soul, which feels pain that there is a part in ourselves that doesn't seek truth and is instead self-serving.

Baruch Hashem we don't always use that part of our soul to commit an outright sin, but still, it should bother us that there is part in us which doesn't want to do what Hashem wants, and not only that, but it is that unrefined point of our soul which we mainly *daven* from...!

If it bothers us why we aren't mainly concerned about *Malchiyos*, the pain we have will at least make us become connected to *Malchiyos*. And it should bother us that we usually *daven* to Hashem from a place in ourselves that is not prepared to hear a "No" from Hashem.

The more these things bother us – and the more we *daven* to Hashem that we merit to leave that self-serving part of ourselves – the more our prayers on Rosh HaShanah will connect us to the purpose of Rosh HaShanah.

In Conclusion

In whatever level one is at, one must be "happy with his lot" (*someiach b'chelko*). If it bothers you that you're not yet on the higher level (as explained here), be happy with the fact that you are bothered, because the fact that you are bothered by this is already an accomplishment. If you merited to feel concerned about *Malchiyos* and you felt yourself mainly concerned for Hashem's *ratzon* and less concerned with His *rachamim*, you should be happy over the fact that you reached that level.

Whatever level you have reached, you should be happy with your level. You need to be happy with the level you are at, while at the same time aspiring for the higher level.

The more that our prayers are coming from a more truthful place in ourselves, the closer we are to the fulfillment of the words **וקבל ברחמים וברצון את תפילותינו**, that Hashem will accept our prayers with His mercy and according to His will.

1.10 | *The Avodah of Rosh HaShanah*⁴²

Malchiyus – Declaring Hashem’s sovereignty

Hashem says on *Rosh HaShanah*, “Declare before Me *malchiyos, zichronos, and shofaros*. Declare *malchiyus* so that I should rule over you.”⁴³

The truth is that in all of the *davening* on *Rosh HaShanah*, the only time we mention “*zichronos*” and “*shofaros*” is in the *tefillah* of *Mussaf*. Throughout all of the *tefillos*, however, we mention *malchiyus*. This shows us that *malchiyus* is the main aspect which we mention on *Rosh HaShanah*.

“There is no king without a nation.”⁴⁴ In order for Hashem to be King on us, so to speak, we need to declare ourselves as His servants. In other words, the *Avodah* we have on *Rosh Hashanah* is not just to declare Hashem as our King. It is mainly that we become *His servants*.

Now that we have clarified that the main *avodah* on *Rosh Hashanah* is to accept our servitude to Hashem, we must know what it means to be an *eved*, a servant. If we truly know what it means to be an “*eved*”, we can understand our mission on this day.

“Eved” – Derogatory or Praiseworthy?

The *Gemara*⁴⁵ says that when we do Hashem’s will, we are called a *ben* (son) of Hashem, and when we don’t do His will, we are called *eved* servant.

It seems from this statement that *eved* is a derogatory title, something we are called when we don’t do Hashem’s will.

However, we find that Moshe Rabbeinu is given the unique title “*eved*” of Hashem. He is also called “*eved ne’eman*” – “trustworthy servant of Hashem”.

This is a paradox. Is *eved* a derogatory title, or is it a praiseworthy title?!

Three Levels

It depends, because there are two implications of the word “*eved*.”

⁴² Adapted from *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Vol. V, p. 262*

<http://www.bilvavi.net/english/rosh-hashannah-avodah-ben-eved>

⁴³ *Rosh HaShanah 16b*

⁴⁴ *Kad HaKemach, Rosh HaShanah 70a*

⁴⁵ *Bava Basra 10a*

1. One person serves his king, not because he loves him, but because he needs the king to fulfill his needs. He's serving the king all for himself. An *eved* like this is the negative implication of *eved*, because all his service to the King is for his own benefit.
2. There is a higher implication of *eved*, and that is when the servant doesn't serve the king for his own personal interests, but because he's devoted entirely to the king. This is the deeper meaning behind why "whatever a servant acquires, his master acquires it" – it is because ideally, a servant has no personal life of his own, and his whole life is devoted to his master. This is the desirable level of *eved* – and one who acts like this fulfills the purpose of Creation. This was the kind of *eved* that Moshe Rabbeinu was. It is the meaning behind the Mishnah in Avos, "Do not be like servants who serve their master in order to receive reward, rather, be like servants who serve their master not to get a reward."

We see from the above that it's possible for a person to act selflessly and be considered "*eved*", and that one doesn't have to be on the level of "*ben*" in order to reach this. *Ben* is when a person goes even beyond that and serves the king out of his love.

A person needs to have selfless devotion to Hashem, and this is "*eved*." With this as well, a person needs to have serve Hashem out of a love for Him, and this is called "*ben*." If so, we have altogether three levels:

1. The lower kind of *eved*, one who serves Hashem only because he needs Him.
2. The higher kind of *eved*, one who serves Hashem because he lives his life for Him.
3. *Ben*, which is when one serves Hashem out of a love for Him.

Practical Guidance for Utilizing Rosh Hashanah

If we want to prepare ourselves for *Rosh Hashanah* and declare Him as King over us – and that we become His servants – we must understand that if we feel as if we are forced into serving Him, we are being the first kind of *eved*, and then the whole purpose of *Rosh Hashanah* will be lost. Our main task on *Rosh Hashanah* we must do is to be like the second kind of *eved*: that our whole lives should be about one goal alone – serving Hashem. This should be why we live our life, and we shouldn't have any other personal desires. This is the inner meaning behind all of our *Avodah* on Rosh Hashanah.

It is not enough just to *daven* slowly and with concentration on Rosh Hashanah. Our main job on this day is to come to a decision that we will change our lives and live only for Hashem – and not for ourselves.

This job obligates us to make a deep internal clarification. We must know exactly what we want to get out of our life, and to examine our deeds to see if they are in line with the goal we are striving for. If one truly decides to live a life of serving Hashem, he has to see if all that he does 24\7 is reflecting this.

How We Can Let Rosh Hashanah Affect Us For The Whole Year

If a person accepts upon himself to become a true *eved* of Hashem, then *Rosh Hashanah* must not end for him on the third day of Tishrei; *Rosh Hashanah* has to carry over into the rest of the year as well, until the next Rosh Hashanah! If a person examines his situation and finds that on Purim and Pesach he doesn't think about Hashem, it must be that he did not have a good Rosh Hashanah. It shows that he did not accept upon himself on *Rosh Hashanah* to become an *eved* of Hashem.

May Hashem merit us that we all accept His sovereignty on Rosh Hashanah, and that we should become His true servants – and through this, we can merit to have the light of *Rosh Hashanah* affect us the whole year round.

1.11 | *A Mother Prepares for Rosh Hashanah*⁴⁶

Men serve Hashem through their Thoughts, Women serve Hashem through Actions

A man uses his faculty of thought to serve Hashem, such as by learning Torah. What is the *avodah* of a woman?

A woman doesn't use the power of thought to serve Hashem – she mainly uses her actions. A woman mainly is involved in her home, with her husband and children. She nourishes them and provides them with their physical needs. In addition to this, a woman also is involved in *chessed*; we will soon explain what this means.

These are the two main aspects of a woman's *avodas Hashem*: her home, and her *chessed*.

The home comes first; it is more important than any *chessed*. But, although running the home is her first priority, it is not good either if a woman is only focused on nourishing her family with their physical needs. A woman who wants to improve herself needs to do *chessed* as well with her family; we will explain what we mean.

Part One: Why We Must Do Chessed

Rav Chaim Volozhiner zt"l wrote in his introduction to *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*, "A person was only created in order to help others." There are people who do a lot of *chessed*, but only because "it's a *mitzvah*." But this is not the purpose of why we do *chessed*. We need to do *chessed* because we were created to help people!

There are many ways to do *chessed*, but the main thing is that we must have a general attitude of always doing *chessed* in our life. When we do *chessed*, are we realizing that we are fulfilling our purpose on this world? It's not mainly about how much *chessed* we do; that is one thing. It is more about what our attitude toward *chessed* is.

A Mother's Role

A Jewish mother is doing *chessed* all day; all day, all she is concerned about is her family's needs. This indeed is her main *Avodas Hashem*. But she must realize that she is doing all this because of *chessed*, not because she was thrown into these responsibilities. She didn't "happen" to fall into this role.

⁴⁶ Adapted from a *shiur* given to women in Elul, in Woodmere, NY.

<http://www.bilvavi.net/english/rosh-hashannah-how-mother-prepares-rosh-hashanah>

A woman doesn't learn Torah; her whole life is *chessed*. So *chessed* has to be her whole attitude on life! She does *chessed*, and in this she doesn't need to improve, because it is all she does all day. But she must do it with an awareness. A woman doesn't do *chessed* because she "happens" to fall into this role of being a housewife; it is part of the way Hashem designed creation, and this has to be her attitude on life: My whole *Avodas Hashem* on this world is to do *chessed*.

That is one part of her *Avodah*: knowing why she takes care of her family. She must realize that this is her whole life's mission, not something she "happens" to do due to life circumstances.

Part Two: Giving Over Proper Values

The second part of a woman's *Avodas Hashem* is the actual *chessed* she does. This is not the same thing as before; we will explain what this is.

It is written, "*Do not forsake the Torah of your mother.*" What Torah do we learn from our mothers, if our mothers did not learn Torah? A woman is exempt from learning Torah; what Torah does she give over to her children? Does she learn *Mishnayos* and *Gemara* with her children?

The "Torah of a mother" is that she gives over to her children the values of life. She doesn't teach her children what to do and what not to do; that is the father's job in *chinuch*. Her job in *chinuch* is to give her how the Torah "smells" – the beautiful fragrance of a Torah lifestyle. She gives over the attitude we must have toward life.

The husband learns Torah, and his role as a father is to teach them right from wrong. But his learning doesn't necessarily give over the proper values to the children; it is the mother who accomplishes this. Why?

When the father goes back to the *Beis Midrash* to learn, it is the mother who remains in the house with the children. They are around her much more than they are around their father. It is she who is giving over the proper values to her children when their father isn't around. She shows her children how to live the Torah lifestyle.

How The Mother Teaches Her Children

In order for a mother to accomplish this, she must practice what she preaches. If she tells her children to live a Torah kind of lifestyle but she herself doesn't keep to her own words, her words will be ineffective on her children. Her words can only penetrate the hearts of her children when they are truthful and come from her heart, when she is an example to them. This is only when she herself lives by the words she says.

This is a woman's role in the home: she brings up her children. This is the real *chessed* that she does in the home. It is not simply that she provides them with their physical needs and nourishes

them; her role is to bring them up with the proper values in life, to show them the how fragrant and sweet a Torah lifestyle is.

She teaches them the proper aspirations to have in life. She teaches them to be happy with life, happiness when doing the *mitzvos*, and what to want in life.

In this way, she does *chessed* her whole life, not just by rote, but as something which personifies her very life.

In Conclusion

If Avraham Avinu would have done *chessed* his whole life because simply “it’s a *mitzvah*” to do *chessed*, he wouldn’t have gotten anywhere. It was only because he viewed *chessed* as his whole purpose in life. *Chessed* personified him; it was his whole attitude about life.

This is the kind of *Chessed* we need to have: not that we should do *Chessed* because we **have** to, but because it should be **how we live** our life.

1.12 | *Meriting A Good Judgment* ⁴⁷

Three Levels of Justice

In the blessing of **השיבנו** in *Shemoneh Esrei*, we ask, **ומלוך עלינו מהרה אתה ה' לבדך** “And rule over us speedily, You, Hashem, alone (with kindness and with compassion, and treat us with righteousness and with justice).”

First in this blessing we ask Hashem to restore our judges, and then we ask Hashem to restore His kingship. What is the connection between the first part of the blessing and the second part of the blessing? It is because we want to be ruled by proper justice, as opposed to being ruled by the jurisdiction of the nations of the world.

There are actually three levels of proper rule which we are asking for in this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*. The first level is that we are asking Hashem to restore our judges, **השיבה שופטינו**. The higher level is that we ask Hashem to restore His rule over us, **ומלוך עלינו מהרה לבדך**, and finally, we ask Hashem to rule over us with *chesed* (kindness), *rachamim* (compassion), *tzedek* (righteousness), and *mishpat* (justice), **בחסד וברחמים וצדקינו בצדק ובמשפט**. We are asking that Hashem should be the Judge over us.

Judgment By Hashem Himself

There is an argument in the words of our Sages about what we are judged for on *Rosh HaShanah*. Although a person is being judged every second of the year, the main judgment takes place on *Rosh HaShanah*, where “all pass before Him like sheep before their Master.” There are different levels of judgment – there is judgment on this world, and there is judgment of Heaven. *Rosh HaShanah* is not just the time when the entire world is judged; it is a judgment in which all creations pass before Hashem in scrutiny, and Hashem Himself is the Judge. During the rest of the year, there is also judgment, but Hashem lets the judgment be delivered by other means. On *Rosh HaShanah*, Hashem is the Judge Himself, so to speak, with no intermediaries to mete out the judgment.

(There are *sefarim hakedoshim* that apply this difference between the first and second days of *Rosh HaShanah* – that on the first day, Hashem is the Judge, while on the second day of *Rosh HaShanah*, He lets the judgment be meted out by the Heavenly Court, thus it is less direct.)

What indeed is the difference if Hashem Himself is judging us, which is *Rosh HaShanah*, with the ordinary level of the rest of the year, in which Hashem does not directly judge us? What difference does it make if it's directly or not from Hashem Himself?

⁴⁷ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-097-meriting-good-judgment>

The description of Elul is, “*Ani L’Dodi, V’Dodi Li*” – “I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me.” It is a time in which we can “*seek Hashem where He is found.*” This continues into the *Aseres Y’mei Teshuvah* (The Ten Days of Repentance) in between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur* as well. During the rest of the year, when it’s not *Yomim Noraim*, we can’t be as close with Hashem as we are during *Yomim Noraim*. Therefore, we are not judged directly by Hashem Himself during the rest of the year, because there is more of a distance. On *Rosh HaShanah*, we are much closer with Hashem, thus Hashem is the Judge Himself on *Rosh HaShanah*.

Even In Death

If a person always made sure during his life to connect himself with Hashem and have a relationship with Him, a life which was “*nochach*”, facing Hashem – then even as he is dying, he will also remain close to Hashem. At death, such a person will merit to be judged by Hashem Himself, and since he lived a life of closeness with Him, he merits a good judgment over the way he has lived his life. Only a person who placed Hashem’s existence in front of him all the time will merit this.

But if a person didn’t make sure to live with Hashem in his life, if he didn’t live a life of *nochach p’nei Hashem* (facing Hashem), on him *Chazal* say, “Remember where you come from, and before Whom you will have to give an accounting.” In other words, a person who lives without feeling Hashem in his life will have reason to be very afraid when he dies one day, for he will have to give an accounting before Hashem, and since he did not live a life of closeness with Him, who knows what will be with his judgment.

Most people in their life might know that eventually we all give an accounting to Hashem one day, but it is often not revealed in a person’s life on a level of awareness. Only someone who lived a life of a relationship with Hashem and spoke with Him on a regular basis, “as a man talks to a friend” (to quote the words of the *Mesillas Yescharim*) will merit a calm feeling at the time of death; he will feel that Hashem is with him, even as he is dying, and he will feel Hashem no less at the time of death than when he was alive.

Such a person realized that although his physical body is here on this earth, he can still live with Hashem in his life, and he views the Heavenly Court as a mere messenger of Hashem, Who is behind everything. Because he recognized in his life how Hashem is the Judge behind it all, he merits to be judged by Hashem Himself, and understandably, he will merit a good judgment, for he is already bound up in closeness with Him. And because Hashem is the Merciful King, the person will surely merit a good judgment - if he has bonded with Him already during his life on this earth.

But if a person did not reveal Hashem in his life – woe is to him from the Day of Judgment!

If a person made sure during the rest of the year to be close with Hashem, he gets even closer to Hashem during Elul, which are days of closeness with Hashem. He merits to be judged from Hashem Himself on *Rosh HaShanah*, thus he will have a favorable judgment. If a person did not develop his bond with Hashem during the rest of the year, though – for example, if he didn’t feel

that Hashem is in front of him when he says the word “*Attah*” (You), then he never felt that Hashem is directly in front of him, and he does not merit a direct judgment from Hashem Himself during *Yomim Noraim*.

The Opportunity Of Elul

However, even if a person didn't merit during the rest of the year to have a relationship with Hashem, during Elul, he has a special opportunity, for Elul is a time of opportunity to become very close with Hashem. Since it is a time in which we are being passing before Hashem in judgment, we are closer to Him, so we have the chance now to ignite our bond with Him. During the rest of the year we are judged by other messengers of Hashem, but during Elul, the entire world is judged by Hashem Himself, and thus Elul is a time of great mercy which one can merit.

The Heavenly Court consist of 24 courts, according to the writings of the *sefarim hakedoshim*. Part of the Heavenly court consists of *tzaddikim* who recently were *niftar* from our generation, and the other part of the Heavenly Courts consists of the angels. But the Heavenly court does not come near the compassion that Hashem has. Hashem has the ultimate *chessed* and *rachamim*. The *chessed* and *rachamim* of even the greatest *tzaddik* you have ever seen does not come near Hashem's *chessed* and *rachamim*.

The Best 'Advice' For Elul

Now we can understand something deeper.

The more a person realizes the *chessed* and *rachamim* of Hashem, the closer he is to meriting it. One of the major pieces of advice brought to merit a good judgment (besides for the many advice that there is) is that if a person made sure to place Hashem's existence in front of him during the rest of the year, he merits a good judgment on *Rosh HaShanah*.

This is accomplished when a person feels during the year that Hashem is the King of all Kings; he nullifies himself to the Creator as his King, and he willingly accepts Hashem's Kingship over himself. But a person has to want this earnestly. A person has to be ready to give up his whole will for Hashem and nullify it completely. Only in this way does a person make Hashem into his King.

There are some things that a person is willing to give up for Hashem, but there are some things a person has which he is not so willing to nullify...

To accept Hashem as King over you means to willingly accept Him as your King who rules over you, to nullify your will to Him completely, and not because you feel forced to do so in any way. If you feel forced at surrendering yourself to Hashem, this is not called accepting Hashem's Kingship over you. The more you accepted Hashem's Kingship over you during the rest of the year – by

nullifying your will to Him and letting His Will rule over you – this is closeness with Hashem, and this is the deep method that can merit you a good judgment.

Not For Self-Interest

But we must know a major fundamental about *Rosh HaShanah*: Woe is to the person who accepts Hashem's Kingship only because he's afraid of the judgment! Such a person is only concerned about his well-being. He is "using Hashem", so to speak, entirely for his own personal reasons! He is using the "crown of the King" – and on a more subtle note, he is using the King Himself - entirely for his own self-interests.

The intention here is not that we have to act entirely *lishmah* (for the sake of Heaven); that would be too difficult. Rather, what we mean is that a person has to make sure that he is not completely immersed in *shelo lishmah* (self-serving motives)!

Thus, even the greatest advice to merit a good judgment we mentioned, which is to accept Hashem's Kingship over us, must not be used for self-interest. The point is not to save oneself from a harsh judgment. The point is rather to earnestly accept upon ourselves Hashem's Kingship, because we seek the truth – because we seek to reveal Hashem on this world. The level of this acceptance depends on each person – some people want it very much, and some people a little less.

People like to use various *eitzos* (advice) to merit a good judgment, such as going to graves of *tzaddikim*, or getting *berachos* from *tzaddikim*, or by giving more *tzedakah*, and by using the advice that is written about in *sefarim hakedoshim*. All of this advice is truthful, but if a person bases his entire *Rosh HaShanah* on such *eitzos*, he is so far from having a connection with Hashem!

Thus, our *avodah* in preparing for the Day of Judgment is two-fold. We must be afraid of the judgment, but at the same time, we must reveal the light of truth, the soul of a Jew which wants a relationship with Hashem. We must want Hashem's Kingship not just because that will merit us a good judgment, but because our soul simply has a yearning to accept Hashem's Kingship on us. This is the true way to reveal how Hashem is the King of justice.

The more a person is truthful, he views the judgment of *Rosh HaShanah* as a way to accept upon himself the Kingship of Hashem. He reveals his soul's yearning for Hashem. The less a person is truthful, he views the judgment of *Rosh HaShanah* entirely as what will be with his fate this year and he focuses on himself alone.

Elul and After Elul

The way to prepare for *Rosh HaShanah*, the way to get closer to Hashem, is to instill ourselves during Elul a kind of closeness with Hashem that will last for the rest of the year as well. There must be a mark on us left from Elul.

Each person needs to think during Elul as he says the words of this blessing in *Shemoneh Esrei* – 'וכו' ומלוך עלינו אתה לבדך וכו' that he wishes to accept upon himself the kingship of Hashem. If a person truly seeks that the kingship of Hashem be restored, saying these words of *Shemoneh Esrei* can awaken the soul to want it more and more, and then it will carry over into the rest of the year as well.

May we merit to prepare ourselves for *Rosh HaShanah*, for the King who will judge us – by revealing a sense of Hashem in our life.

1.13 | *Praying For Others*⁴⁸

ומלוך עלינו וכו' בחסד וברחמים , We ask Hashem to rule over us with *chessed* (kindness) and with *rachamim* (compassion), and that He rule over us alone.

Rosh HaShanah is the *Yom HaDin* (Day of Judgment), and it is the day in which we declare Hashem as King.

The Sages say that one of the reasons we blow *shofar* is to cause a “sweetening of the judgment” (*hamtakas dinim*), whereupon Hashem switches Himself, so to speak, from the “Throne of *middas hadin* (attribute of judgment)” and instead He sits upon the “Throne of *middas harachamim* (attribute of mercy)”. *Rosh HaShanah* is “*Yom HaDin*”; if not for *shofar*, there would be just *din* judgment – and there would be just “*dina d’malchusa dina*”, “the law of the government is the law”, which would leave us strict judgment and no room for mercy.

These are the words of the Sages. Let us try to understand how this works, and how we can change *din*/judgment to *rachamim*/mercy, how to declare Hashem as King and merit *chessed* and *rachamim* from Him.

Meriting A Good Judgment: Attaching Yourself To The Whole of Klal Yisrael

It is a well-known matter that in order for a person to merit a good judgment, he cannot be self-absorbed in his own life. He has to unify with others. He must do for others. The more a person attaches himself with the *tzibbur* (the collective whole of the Jewish people), the more he is deserving of miracles.

These are based upon the words of our Sages; they were always well-known, especially in Kelm, where they would work on these matters already before the *Yom HaDin*. But there are levels upon levels to the understanding behind this concept.

To illustrate, there are many layers to our existence. We are made of outer layers and inner layers; there is the physical features of the body, and deeper inside the body is the skin, bones, and sinews. Our blood contains our *nefesh habeheimis* (the “animal layer of the soul”), and deeper within our soul is our *Nefesh Elokus* (the G-dly, Divine part of the soul). Within the *Nefesh Elokus* is the *Shechinah* (Hashem’s Presence) itself.

The deeper a person reflects into himself, the more inner layers he uncovers to his existence. The lesson from this is clear: There is depth within depth to all of Creation.

⁴⁸ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-098-praying-others-rosh-hashanah>

With regards to our discussion: the advice from our Sages that a person needs to attach himself to the *tzibbur* is also a concept that also has layers upon layers of understanding to it.

The superficial understanding of it is to simply “do” things for the *tzibbur*. However, this is not yet the depth of the matter. We will need to go inward into the understanding behind the concept.

It’s not enough for the individual to declare Hashem as King. There is a rule that “There is no king without a nation”, thus, there must be a collective unit that declares Hashem as King, in order for the Kingship of Hashem to be complete. In our current times, the entire Jewish people needs to declare Hashem as King, and in the future, all of Creation will declare Him as King, even the gentile nations of the world.

Thus, the advice of our Sages to attach ourselves with the *tzibbur* is not just advice to survive the *Yom HaDin*. It is to help us really declare Hashem as King. It is to show that it is not enough to declare Hashem as King on an individual level. The entire *tzibbur* needs to declare Hashem as King. Thus, by each of us attaching ourselves to the collective *tzibbur* of *Klal Yisrael*, the national declaration of Hashem’s Kingship can be accomplished.

Connecting To The Shofar

To understand this concept deeper, there are two aspects of Rosh HaShanah: The fact that it is *Yom HaDin*, and its aspect of *shofar*, where *din* (judgment) is transformed into *rachamim* (mercy). The fact that *shofar* transforms *din* into *rachamim* does not mean that a person simply believes that the blowing of the *shofar* will do all the work for him, and that he can just sit there and do nothing. The effect of the *shofar* can only work for the individual based on his person level.

It is explained by our earlier commentators that the two days of Rosh HaShanah are separate judgments: The first day of Rosh HaShanah is to seal the strict judgment for those who are undeserving, while the second day of Rosh HaShanah is the day of sweeter judgments. Thus, some people are judged on the first day, and others are judged on the second day. The general difference is that the soul is judged on the first day while the body is judged on the second day, but the more detailed definition of it is that those who are undeserving are judged strictly on the first day, while those who merit it are judged with a sweeter judgment on the second day.

The depth behind this is that those who are judged on the first day are judged by Hashem even before the *shofar* is blown, while those who are judged on the second day are judged after the effects of the *shofar*, which gives them a sweeter judgment.

The *shofar* mitigates the judgment as follows: The sound of the *shofar*, which is called “*teruah*”, hints to the words “*teruas melech*” (a sound in declaration of the King). Rav Saadya Gaon states that one of the reasons we blow *shofar* on Rosh HaShanah is because the *shofar* declares Hashem as King, and this is what sweetens the judgment. Therefore, blowing the *shofar* contains a declaration of Hashem’s Kingship, and that is how it sweetens the judgment. But this can only happen if the nation is unified in declaring Hashem as King. If the souls of the Jewish people are split apart from

one another and there is a lack of collectedness, they cannot come together in unison to declare Hashem as King.

Now we can understand better why a person needs to attach himself to the *tzibbur* in order to merit a good judgment. It is because we must all be unified together, in love, in order to declare Hashem as King on the national level; if not, we aren't able to have the "*teruas melech*" of the *shofar* which is needed to mitigate the judgment. "There is no King without a nation" - when the nation of the Jewish people is disparate and they are unified together, they can't come together in unison to declare Hashem as King, and there is no "nation" then to declare Him as King.

Declaring Hashem as King can only happen on its true level when there is unity and friendship amongst the Jewish people. As we say in *davening*, "They **all** accept themselves the yoke of Heaven." There must be unity amongst the Jewish people in order to declare Hashem together as King.

Thus, *shofar* doesn't come and sweeten the judgment for someone who isn't unified with others. Of course, a person always fulfills the *mitzvah* of *shofar* as long as hears it correctly, no matter what level he is on. But if he doesn't unify with the *tzibbur*, although he fulfills the *mitzvah* of *shofar* on a purely Halachic level, he will not merit the special sweetening of the judgment that the *shofar* can cause - because he isn't connected to the concept of the *shofar*.

Wishing Good Upon Others

Every person declares Hashem as King on Rosh HaShanah, and we ask Hashem to judge us with *chessed* and *rachamim*. But whom are we *davening* for, when we ask for *chessed* and *rachamim*...?

If we are apart from each other in our hearts, if all we think about on Rosh HaShanah is ourselves – whether it's our physical situation or our spiritual situation, each to his own – then all our *tefillos* on Rosh HaShanah are totally self-centered! Even if a person *davens* for his family on Rosh HaShanah, if he doesn't *daven* for others, he's still self-absorbed. His declaration of Hashem as King will only be on his private and individual level, and he is lacking it on the national level; his declaration of Hashem's Kingship is thus incomplete.

If one wants Hashem's *chessed* and *rachamim* solely for himself and his family, he is really removing himself from the entire concept of the *malchiyos*, of declaring Hashem as King. The entire world must to declare Hashem as King on Rosh HaShanah. If a person is entirely concerned on Rosh HaShanah for his own verdict, and he's crying to Hashem to be written in the Book of Life and this is all he thinks about, and he's asking Hashem for more *ruchniyus* this year, he can still be totally self-absorbed in his needs. He is asking Hashem for *chessed* and *rachamim* entirely for himself! This is not the meaning of declaring Hashem as King and to wish that He would extend His *chessed* and *rachamim* upon the world.

The true way to go about it, the advice of *Chazal* to merit the good judgment we mentioned, is by connecting oneself with the *tzibbur*. This is not by *davening* for yourself, and this is not either accomplished by "using the *tzibbur*" as a way for a person to save himself. That's missing the whole

point. The point is for a person *to nullify himself* to the *tzibbur* - and not to do so purely for his own merits, which would defeat the whole purpose of attaching oneself to the *tzibbur*.

When a person doesn't reflect into this concept, he will attempt to do both at once: to *daven* entirely for himself on Rosh HaShanah, and to attach himself with the *tzibbur*, entirely so he can build his own merits. But this won't work, because it's a contradiction. In order to attach oneself with the *tzibbur*, a person has to go beyond himself and not think about himself.

The month of Elul is about being on a higher level. For example, there is the stringency during Elul that we do not eat *pas akum* (bread baked by a gentile). The depth behind acting on a higher level during Elul is that a person goes above himself, which is the true meaning of declaring Hashem as King. It is by leaving the self-absorption so we can declare Hashem as King and feel nullified to Him. One who can't transcend his ego during these days of Elul is someone who is far removed from the concept of declaring Hashem as King.

If someone is a bit in touch with his soul, these days of Elul are able to uplift him beyond the ego and to connect himself with the collective whole of the Jewish people. Becoming more uplifted during Elul shouldn't be just limited to practicing more *dikduk hadin* (becoming more careful with *Halacha*). It is more about leaving your individual aspect behind, which cares and worries only for yourself, and to instead enter into the collective aspect of the Jewish people.

The Depth Behind Malchiyos\Declaring Hashem As King

This is the whole concept behind "*malchiyos*" (declaring Hashem as King). The whole concept of "*malchiyos*" is based entirely on this idea that a person has to be able to leave his ego and instead connect himself with the Jewish people. The only way to really declare "*malchiyos*" is to declare it together with the Jewish people, and this can only happen if one connects himself with the Jewish people and leaves his ego.

How does a person connect himself more with others and leave his ego? It doesn't happen just by giving out *tzedakah* on Erev Rosh HaShanah and by accepting upon oneself that he will do more things for the *tzibbur*, basing this on the concept that as long as the *tzibbur* needs him, he will merit a good year. These are "*segulos*" (spiritual charms) that only work if the person has the basis. Without the basis, there is no energy that can actively be drawn forth from any of these *segulos*. The basis is: that a person has to uplift himself beyond his self-interests.

Thus, when a person gives *tzedakah* to others before Rosh HaShanah in order to accrue merits for the *Yom HaDin*, he has to ask himself if he really wants that Hashem should have *chesed* and *rachamim* upon others. The point is that I have to want that others, besides for me, should also merit *chesed* and *rachamim* from Hashem.

This is the depth behind the *Yom HaDin*. The more I have compassion on others and the more I wish that others merit a compassionate judgment from Hashem - herein lays the concept of *malchiyos*, and it is this attitude which really declares Hashem as King.

This concept, “*malchiyos*”, is far removed from most people. This is because the entire concept of declaring Hashem as King is really something that is above our level; in fact, these days of Elul are really days that are above our normal level. But even though Elul is above our actual level, there are two ways how a person can go about it this. A person is apt to feel, “These days of Elul are anyways too high of a level for me to be on.” He basically buries his head in the sand on the 27th of Elul and remains that way on Rosh HaShanah, devoid of any aspiration to grow.

But the other attitude a person can have is, “It is true that these days of *Yomim Noraim* are way above my actual level. However, in spite of this, there is still a *segulas hazeman* (special time of opportunity) now, and therefore, I can go now a little above my current level.” It is for a person to **believe**, through *emunah*, that there is a place in his soul in which he can go above his current level, a little bit. Even though a person knows he isn’t actually on a high level, he can yearn for it during these days of *Yomim Noraim*, and that is how we will be able to get there. After all, Elul are days in which we can realize the verse, “*Seek Hashem, where He is found.*”

Elul and *Yomim Noraim* are a time in which we can a little above our normal level. But we must yearn to be on that level during the entire year as well! It’s not about entering this higher place in our soul during Elul and then leaving it. It is about entering it with the intention that it will affect us for the rest of the year. It is by desiring that Hashem should be King over the world, and that is how the high level we reach in Elul can affect us for the rest of the year as well.

Making This Practical

On Rosh HaShanah, a person inevitably *davens* for his needs. Indeed, *Chazal* say that one should one *daven* for his needs on Rosh HaShanah. But one’s personal needs should not be taking up his entire prayers. That being the case, a person should at least devote some of his prayers to *davening* about someone else.

To work on this practically, find someone to *daven* about on Rosh HaShanah. It should not be someone who is family or someone you feel dependent on in any way. Instead, *daven* on Rosh HaShanah a little bit for someone else who is not involved in your family life, and *daven* for that person from the depths of your heart, as much as you *daven* for your own needs. Think about another Jew, and what he needs, and what *rachamim* he needs, and *daven* for him that Hashem should judge him with *rachamim*.

Each person *davens* differently on Rosh HaShanah and has different things to *daven* about. But the common denominator between all Jews is that we all have to devote some of our prayers to others, and not to *daven* for our own selves. And this is what lies behind the entire concept of *malchiyos* to declare Hashem as King.

May we all merit together to be written for a good year, and that His Name be fully revealed. *Amen, amen, v’amen.*

1.14 | Fear & Closeness On Rosh HaShanah⁴⁹***How To Approach The Yamim Noraim (High Holy Days)***

We will try here a little, with *siyata d'shmaya*⁵⁰, to think and to internalize the matters that will be explained here. First we will learn about this matter in a way that our minds can know it, and then we will attempt to internalize the matters in our heart. It is then up to each person here to try to act upon these matters in his own life.

The simple perspective we have towards the *Yomim Noraim*⁵¹ is that they are “*Y'mei Din*”, days of judgment. There is Rosh HaShanah, then the Ten Days of Repentance, and then Yom Kippur, where we prepare for the *Yom HaDin* (the day of judgment).

There are generally two main ways how to view *Yomim Noraim*. One way to look at it is that they are days of *din*, judgment. Hashem judges all people, big or small, and even the angels are judged, for the entire Creation is being judged. Hashem judges the entire spectrum of each person – all of his deeds, words, feelings, thoughts, and desires. That is one aspect of how to view Rosh HaShanah: All people in Creation are judged, and each person is judged on an all-inclusive level.

Another way to look at Rosh HaShanah, though, is that it is the one day of the year where all Creations pass directly before Hashem, where we each come into close contact with Hashem. During the rest of the year, only *tzaddikim*⁵² merit such an audience with Hashem, but for one time a year, every single person in the world, no matter level he is on, stands before the King. It is a merit given to each of us, whether one is one of the 36 greatest *tzaddikim* or where he is the lowest person in the world. During the rest of the year, where we *daven* three times a day, we also stand before Hashem, and we speak with Him. But on Rosh HaShanah, each person stands before Hashem, regardless of whether he comes to *shul* or not.

So it is the Day of Judgment, and it is also a time of great closeness with Hashem. These are the two root perspective towards Rosh HaShanah.

Knowing Vs. Feeling

But besides for knowing about these concepts, we need to really feel these concepts. It is one thing to *know* about this, but to *feel* it is a second step. It is possible that a person “knows” about these things, but he doesn't *feel* it at all; or he feels it only minimally.

⁴⁹ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/rosh-hashannah-047-fear-closeness-rosh-hashanah>

⁵⁰ Heavenly assistance

⁵¹ The “high holy days” of the year, which begin in the month of Elul and includes Rosh HaShanah, The 10 Days of Repentance, and Yom Kippur (and Succos)

⁵² the righteous

If someone wants to feel that there is just *Yom HaDin* approaching, and he doesn't try to feel how these days are closeness with Hashem, this is only half the *avodah*.⁵³ These words we are explaining here will have to be *felt* by us, because it will not be enough to 'know' them on an intellectual level.

The Fine Balance

There are some people who become very afraid during *Yamim Noraim*. They are aware that the *Yom HaDin* is coming, and they are so afraid from this that they have to take pills to calm down their anxiety. Others who hear about this might think that these people are on a very high spiritual level for being so afraid of the *Yamim Noraim*. But the truth is that if a person only feels fear during these days and he doesn't feel how these days are days of closeness to Hashem, it can lead to much fear and anxiety.

But if a person feels the trepidation of *Yom HaDin* and he also feels the closeness with Hashem during these days, his soul is connected to both aspects and he attains the proper balance, and he will be calmed. Our soul must feel both the fear of the *Yom HaDin* which is coming, where Hashem will judge each person, and our soul must also feel that it is standing before its Creator.

How can we begin to open our feelings towards this? The purpose of the words here is to explain how we can draw these matters to ourselves as closely and as practical as possible, in a way that can apply to all types of people, no matter what level they are on. After that, each person can progress from there, on his own level.

The First Part – Fearing The Judgment

All of us have gone through this year, where we each had pleasant days, as well as difficult days. We have all gone through something hard this year. A person should sit down to think of what has transpired to him this past year. You cannot remember every last detail of course, but just try to remember the general events that happened to you this year. We each went through pleasant experiences and we each went through difficult experiences. Is anyone afraid of going through such experiences again next year?

If one had an easy year with no hardships, he does not have to think about this. But if you did have a year with hardships, try to relive the experience in your mind and feel again what happened.

When you reflect about what you went through this year, you can remember both positive events of this year which brought pleasantness to you as well as difficult events – *tzaros* (ordeals). Each has his own; one kind of person had difficulties with finding a *shidduch*; another person has a child who is ill and he is waiting for his child's recovery; another person is in need of livelihood; and another person needs *nachas* from his children. Another person had difficulties in learning Torah, another

⁵³ *avodah* – inner work or task

person had challenges with working on their *middos*, and another person had a hard time with his *davening*.

Does anyone here feel that there were difficult things he went through this past year? If someone denies this, he didn't make this reflection well enough. Any person can reflect about this past year and find what the hardest part of this year was for him.

After thinking about it, now ask yourself: Do you want next year to return to that hardship? Or would you rather that next year should not have that difficulty?

Awakening Our Sense of "Yirah"

Let us explain the depth behind what we are saying here.

Our *sefarim hakedoshim* explain that it is hard to fear the *Yom HaDin*. Why can't we see it and feel it so easily? It is because we cannot see with our physical eyes the judgment that takes place. Our eyes only see the physical. A person knows of the *Yom HaDin*, but he doesn't feel it. So in order to feel the *Yom HaDin*, we need to look at it no less than when we are afraid of something. If we cannot see that it is a *Yom HaDin*, and we have only read about it and we have heard about it, we do not relate it tangibly. If we cannot sense something, it is hard to feel it. We can know about it, but it is hard to feel it.

What is the way of how we can better feel it? We need to reflect into this past year and see what resulted from last year's *Yom HaDin*. We can all see last year's *Yom HaDin*. We did not see the actual *din*, but we saw what resulted from the *din*. We know very well what resulted, from this year and from previous years.

Thus, the suggested method of getting ourselves to feel the *Yom HaDin* is, that besides for reflecting into the very concept of *Yom HaDin*, one needs to have some kind of experience it, based on his own past feelings that relate to the *Yom HaDin*. We cannot create a new fear if we have never gone through a fear. Anything that we fear is based on a previous experience we have went through.

In order to feel *Yom HaDin*, we should use our own imagination and **relive** the feelings we already recognize. If we relate to it with a minimal kind of feeling that is not that intense, we do not awaken such a fear of the *Yom HaDin*. But if we can remember the very intense and painful things we went through this year, which we know are a result of last year's *Yom HaDin* – and then we can awaken a real feeling for the *Yom HaDin*, because those are feelings we recognize well. That helps us relate to a fear of the *Yom HaDin*.

Reliving The Feelings

First, we must know what is missing from our fear of the *Yom HaDin*, and how we can fill the void and reach true fear of the *Yom HaDin*.

When you remember the hardest thing you went through this year and you know you don't want to go through it again this coming year, you can awaken a degree of fear of the *Yom HaDin*. But it won't work if you just remember the event superficially and you don't try to relive it.

When a person learns a Gemara and he doesn't understand it, it doesn't take long for him to realize that he doesn't understand it. But when it comes to thinking about this year's hardships, most people have a hard time doing this. Why? What are we missing?

It is because people just think and remember about the past year, but they don't try to really relive in their minds the painful experiences that they encountered, because it's unpleasant to recall it. It is not enough to remember what happened this year; we need to re-enter the pain that we had this year. The mere memory isn't that painful. But if you go deeper into the memory (in terms of the soul, this uses the powers in the soul called '*shoimer*' and '*medameh*', where our memory is retained through the imagination), you relive the experience, and then you can feel the pain of what you went through.

Understandably, there will be those who will not want to do this, because it is unpleasant and it is fearful to relive those painful events. But if one doesn't relive the pain, his memory of the event will only be intellectual and a bit emotional, and it will not feel that painful, so it will not awaken that much fear. One has to enter the memory of it and relive the pain, which helps him feel the pain on an emotional level, as opposed to just being aware of it with his intellect and memory.

For example, if a person lost his father, does he remember what he felt like by the funeral? A person might remember the whole funeral and all its detail until the burial, but that doesn't necessarily mean he is reliving his pain. A person needs to return in his mind to that time and remember the exact pain he felt. If a person watches a video of his father's funeral, what does he feel? Does he just remember it, or does he relive the experience? He relives it. His soul returns to the funeral.

Memory alone doesn't help us feel the experience on an emotional level. But if we relive it through vividly imagining, we return to the painful feeling of what we went through, and then we feel the pain again.

When you relive the pain, now ask yourself: What is the pain saying? What are we feeling deep down as we are in pain? The pain is really saying: "Hashem, save me from this. It is so hard for me! I can't take this! Have mercy on me! Just take this away from me!!" That is how a person cries out to Hashem when he is in pain.

Again, I must emphasize that the point of this is not simply to remember the events that happened to you this year, but to actually relive the experience in your mind and to feel the pain you felt then. Your fear will then be awakened, and you won't want it to happen again this year. This very method is also the same method that can be used for developing *yiras ha'onesh* (fear of punishment).

Just knowing about the *Yom HaDin* intellectually, through reading the words of *Chazal* about it, or through reading lofty ideas about it - which is certainly necessary to know and learn about - is not

enough to make us feel an actual fear of the *Yom HaDin*. We need to be able to relate to it on a personal level and then we are affected. Reading about the *Yom HaDin* speaks to our intellect, but it doesn't speak to our emotions. *Yirah* (fear) is only felt in our emotions, not in our intellect. If the *yirah* remains only in our intellect and our emotions don't feel the *yirah*, then we don't feel any *yirah* towards the *Yom HaDin*.

There are more examples as well that we can bring, which can help us awaken *yirah* towards the *Yom HaDin*. For example, a person should try thinking about the scariest time in his life. To start, he should take a pen and paper and write down five scary experiences he went through in his life. Write down the most fearful experiences you ever had. Relive the fear, and that is how you can awaken *yirah*.

Yirah Vs. Passing Inspiration

The truth is that it is not so easy to awaken a fear for the *Yomim Noraim*. We are taught by the *baalei mussar* that a person knows very well that there is a *Yom HaDin*, but he doesn't feel it. It is not a feeling that comes on its own. It is an inner kind of fear which one needs to work hard to acquire. People think that a little bit of inspiration will be enough to transform their entire Rosh HaShanah, and that they don't need to awaken any fear.

I was once in a *shul* on Rosh HaShanah where the Rav was giving a *derasha* before *shofar*, and I heard a person there saying, "This *derasha* turned around my entire Rosh HaShanah!" There are either one of two possibilities that happened here. Either the words of the Rav's *derasha* were so deep that they penetrated straight into the deepest part of his heart and it transformed him entirely (in one moment), or, his entire Rosh HaShanah is so superficial that it can get 'turned around' and manipulated so easily. A few moments later this person might 'turn around' his Rosh HaShanah again, and again, and again....

If we are looking to be inspired superficially, this is easy. There are all kinds of ways to do this. But if we want true and genuine *yirah* which stays with us permanently, we need to enter our own souls.

We need to enter the deepest fear we know of from our own life. We cannot produce a new *yirah*. All we can do is enter the level of *yirah* we already know of from our own life and then deepen it. But we have to relive our own fear, and we can't come up with new fear.

Although people like to say that Rosh HaShanah is a time of which it is described, "*Seek Hashem where He is found*", and "*Call out to Him where He is close*", and that Rosh HaShanah is festive time and a time of joy, although this is all true, we must remember that it is also the *Yom HaDin*!

If one wants to prepare himself from the *Yom HaDin*, he should use the advice given here, or other kinds of advice which our Sages spoke about, which draws ourselves closer to a genuine fear of the *Yom HaDin*, as realistically as possible.

In Summary of Part One

In summary, we need to awaken *yirah* for the *Yom HaDin*, and we have laid down here two possible methods of working on this. One method is to awaken the most fearful thing that happened to you this past year, and realize that it was because of the most recent *Yom HaDin*. The alternative method we mentioned is to write down the five scariest things that happened to you in your life, and try to see which of these evokes the most fear. To emphasize, don't just remember the events; relive the experiences of the fear you had. Then realize that the *Yom HaDin* is what brought these fearful events to take place in your life.

All of this is part of the first part of preparing for the *Yom HaDin*, which is to have a sense of fear the approaching *Yom HaDin*.

Part Two: Feeling the Closeness with Hashem

Now we will explain the second part of how to approach the *Yomim Noraim*, which is: To feel the closeness that we can have to Hashem during these days.

In simple words, the purpose of creation is to become attached with Hashem (*d'veykus*)' to have *kirvas Hashem* (closeness to Hashem). Becoming close to Hashem is described as Dovid HaMelech said, "And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good." There are levels within levels of this closeness. Here we will only explain the roots of this matter.

We become attached with Hashem through doing the *mitzvos*, because this connects us to His will. Hashem commanded us to do certain deeds, and when we perform these deeds, we are doing His will. When we do the *mitzvos*, we are attached to His *ratzon* (will).

Another way of how we connect ourselves with Hashem is through learning the Torah, which is Hashem's *chochmah* (wisdom). Through this means, we are connected with the Creator.

A third means of how we connect ourselves to Hashem - which is the main *avodah* of *Yomim Noraim* - is when we feel, in the depths of our heart, Hashem's existence. It is to feel Him simply, and with palpable and clear awareness, where we feel Hashem in our heart.

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 the *avodah* explained earlier of 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.

Now we will think into this and how we can draw it closer to ourselves on a more practical level.

Firstly, any sensible person knows that this is not only an *avodah* for only Rosh HaShanah; its root begins on Rosh HaShanah, but it is meant for the entire year as well, because it is our entire life. We need to get used to feeling Hashem's existence as a simple feeling.

Stage 1: Knowing That Hashem Exists

First we need to first know about this concept on an intellectual level, and then we need to internalize it in our heart as a feeling.

We need to know, clearly: Where is Hashem found? He is found every place. He is found in every time and in every soul as well. This fact must be carved very, very deeply into our minds: Hashem is found everywhere. To feel this palpably will be another step, but first, we must know it clearly.

You Are Never Alone

Therefore: Is there such a thing as a person ever being "alone"?

Last week when I left my home in Eretz Yisrael, I was saying goodbye to my children before I left. I told one of my older children: "You should know that you have two fathers. You have a father who lives in Eretz Yisrael, who is now going away, and you have a Father in Heaven. I am leaving Eretz Yisrael temporarily and I will not be here with you now, but you still have your Father in Heaven." This is an attitude with which to view life with. A person is always, constantly, with Hashem. If a person ever feels lonely - and many times, people indeed feel lonely - it is a sign that he does not feel that Hashem is next to him. He feels that he is alone.

The first step is that one must know clearly in his mind, that there is no such as being alone. We can be with a few people or we can be with a lot of people, we can be with no one else, but we are always found with Hashem. This is not just another fact to know about in life. It is the basis upon which all our life is built.

Each person needs to set aside time to think about Hashem's existence. When should he do this? Here is an example of when he can try it. When a person goes to sleep - what does he think about before he gets into bed? He is thinking about the day that transpired. When one does this, is he thinking, or is he imagining? (If he is 'thinking' about the day, he is on a high spiritual level.) Usually a person is experiencing his thoughts through memory, and memory is based upon imagination.

Instead, there are two kinds of proper thoughts that one can think about before he goes to sleep, generally speaking. Either he should think about the *sugya* of Gemara he learned that day, or, he should think that underneath his covers, there are two beings here: there is you, and there is Hashem.

Every night, a person can do this before he goes to sleep, and as soon as he pulls the cover over himself he says to himself, “*Ribono shel Olam*, I am not alone underneath my covers”. He recognizes that there is another here besides for himself; he is not alone. Every night, one should go to sleep like this and think of this, for just a few minutes. If he can’t do it for 5 minutes, he can try doing to for 2 minutes. If he can’t do it for 2 minutes, he can try doing it for 1 minute, or 30 seconds – or even 1 second to just give some thought about this. The point is to train the soul into this feeling of Hashem’s existence.

Many times we find ourselves alone. Sometimes we find ourselves in a country where we don’t recognize anyone, and sometimes we are all alone in a room. What is going through the person’s mind then? Is the person thinking, “I’m alone”? Any time you find yourself alone (this is not referring to extremely difficult situations where you feel very lonely), think to yourself that you are not alone. In fact, at times, you should deliberately go to a place where there are no people there (as long as it’s not a dangerous place to be in), and tell yourself, “I am not alone. Hashem is with me.” Go there on purpose, and make sure you will be alone.

You should think about this not just 1000 times and not just 10,000 times – but much more than that. This might sound like an exaggeration. But you can think about it 10 times a day, 20 times a day, 30 times a day, and you thereby train your soul to get used to it. It is a thought which must fill our entire mind. It is another fact of life to know about in life. It is the very essence of life.

Hashem originally placed Adam in Gan Eden. When he sinned, he ran into hiding. Hashem called out to Adam, “Where are you?” Adam was afraid and ashamed, so he hid. Ever since then, man has been in “hiding” from Hashem; he feels ashamed from Hashem. Before the sin, man lived with G-d and felt His presence clearly, and there was no sense of separation between man and G-d. Man knew that Hashem is always next to Him, at all times.

Man knew that even Gehinnom wouldn’t separate him from G-d. If a Jew ever goes to Gehinnom, *Rachamana litzlan*, what should he do? If a person is told that there is a decree of Gehinnom on him for the next 40 years, what should he do? Hashem should help each of us that none of us should ever go to Gehinnom - but if a Jew does have to go there, he should know that Hashem is still with him!⁵⁴ And then he will feel that he is in Gan Eden, even in Gehinnom.

The thought that we are never alone, for Hashem is always with us, is a thought that must envelope our entire mind and heart.

How Do We Become Closer To Hashem and Feel His Existence?

Let’s think about the following simple point.

Let’s say a person lived a generally good year this year: he learned Torah, he did mitzvos, he *davened*, he did *chessed*, he got along with others, etc. But if he did not talk to Hashem enough

⁵⁴ In *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh (Vol I)*, the Rav quoted this in the name of Rav Shach zt”l

during the year (at least three times a day), and now Rosh HaShanah is approaching, will he suddenly sense a closeness with Hashem?

Even though he keeps hearing in all the speeches and in all the *sefarim* that Rosh HaShanah is a time of more closeness with Hashem, that it is the time of “*Seek Hashem, where He is found*”, he will find that he still doesn’t feel any closeness. He tries looking around in *sefarim*, in order to feel closer to Hashem.

I remember that when I was a *bochur*, and *Aseres Y’mei Teshuvah* was approaching, I began looking through *sefarim* so that I could feel something. I kept reading, reading, and reading. I realized that the only thing I “felt” was that I felt nothing!

So I thought to myself, it must be that I need to keep reading more *sefarim*, and then finally I will feel something. It came Rosh HaShanah, and I tried concentrating very deeply throughout the day in order to feel something, but I found that I could not concentrate on it as I would have liked to.

I thought to myself, “It would be so much better if I was Sephardic. That way I can wrap myself in a *tallis* even as a *bochur*, and then I would be able to concentrate even better.” Being that I was not Sephardic, all I had was my hat and jacket, and I wished I could wear a *tallis* so that I could wrap my head in it and concentrate better. But what was the real answer? It is because the heart was not there.

A person goes about his routine during the year and then suddenly he sees that on the calendar, it will soon be Rosh HaShanah. He has to make peace with what it says on the calendar....but his heart is not with him.

Baruch Hashem, he hears an inspiring lecture and he is told that he must feel close to Hashem. He knows that he needs to, but he is not *there*. If he is not there, he will not be able to suddenly feel during *Yomim Noraim* that he is *there*, when his soul is not already connected to there. By contrast, if a person’s entire year is spent with feeling a closeness to Hashem, his feelings during *Yomim Noraim* deepen, and he becomes even closer to Hashem.

But if a person doesn’t feel any closeness to Hashem during the rest of the year, when it comes *Yomim Noraim* he might know that he is supposed to feel something, but he doesn’t actually feel, and it just pains him that he doesn’t feel.

Feeling close to Hashem is not something you can suddenly jump into in a moment. Compare this to a person coming in middle of a 2-hour *shiur* on the Gemara when there are 5 minutes left to the *shiur*, and he sits down to the Gemara and quickly asks the Rav, “I don’t understand something here.” It’s not that he didn’t ‘understand’ – he has never heard anything to begin with, because you can’t suddenly grasp an entire *shiur* when you came at the last 5 minutes of the *shiur*.

If a person lives throughout the year in which he tries to be close to Hashem, the days of *Yomim Noraim* serve to deepen that closeness he already feels and he receives greater clarity of those feelings. He is already connected to that closeness. But if the rest of the year is not spent on trying to become close to Hashem, a person does not feel it suddenly when it comes *Yomim Noraim*.

Today it is the 24th of Elul. If a person today decides that he wants to feel closer to Hashem during these days, what should he do? He should begin today, *now*, a kind of life where he can feel Hashem regularly. It should become his normal routine of life. One must enter into a life which is all about a deep bond in our heart with Hashem.

There are people who think a lot about *hashgacha peratis* (Divine Providence), which is wonderful, but they don't realize that Hashem is next to them! Hashem is guiding this world from Heaven, but the knowledge of this alone doesn't enable a person to feel Hashem next to him. Of course a person should know about *hashgacha peratis*, and it is a part of our *avodah*, but he must be aware that this is only part of one's *avodah*; there is far more.

Even if a person feels that Hashem loves him, this doesn't mean he feels that Hashem is always with him and next to him. Love doesn't always mean a sense of togetherness. For example, right now I am in America, and my children are in Eretz Yisrael. Do I love my children? Yes. Am I together with them right now? No. So too, it's possible that a person feels that he has a Father in heaven, Hashem, and that he is His child; but he still doesn't always feel that Hashem is next to him and that He is with him at this very moment.

The Ten Days of Repentance, and Rosh HaShanah, are not just days where Hashem is watching over us with *hashgachah peratis*, although that is certainly true that He is; and these are not just days of mercy, which is also true. These are not just days where Hashem loves us as His children. It is even more than this. It is a time where a person can feel simply that Hashem is with him.

First one must know this clearly, and then he should verbalize it with his mouth, again and again.

The Importance of Talking To Hashem

When Yosef HaTzaddik had to descend to Egypt, the Sages say that "the Name of Heaven was on his lips." This doesn't mean that a person always says "*Baruch Hashem*." That would be the name of Hashem on his lips alone, but it doesn't show that it's on his heart. It means that a person expresses what is in his heart, "*piv v'libo shavin*", that one's mouth and heart are in line with each other. A person speaks with Hashem every day, three times, in prayer. The *Kuzari* says that when a person is earnest in his prayer, as soon as he ends his prayer he is looking forward to the next prayer. When he finishes *Shacharis*, he is looking forward to *Mincha*. What should he do in between *Shacharis* and *Mincha*? Should he just wait? He can speak with Hashem between *Shacharis* and *Mincha*!

This does not mean that he should *daven* another *tefillas Shemoneh Esrei* again. Just talk simply to Hashem in between all the prayers. Getting used to this will feel like trying to learn a new language, which is very difficult to learn. So what should a person do when he has a hard time getting used to this new 'language' of talking to Hashem? If a person is learning about a certain language and he is not understanding it, what should he do? He should try again and ask Hashem to help him understand!

There is a kind of life where a person lives with Hashem throughout the day. **This is not a hard *avodah* at all to do. It is all a matter of habit and getting used to.**

The *avodah* we spoke of earlier, *yirah*, is a much more difficult *avodah* than what we are describing here. What we are speaking about now is entirely a matter of habit - it is not an "*avodah*". A person should get used to thinking many times throughout the day that he is not alone, and he thinks about this every night before he goes to sleep, and whenever he finds himself alone he thinks about this, and he sets aside time each day to be alone and he thinks about this and he talks to Hashem about this. But along with this, one needs to also speak to Hashem throughout the entire day and get used to this.

Understandably, he should not look like an insane person when he does this. But the point is that he should just get used to talking with Hashem. This should become the way his life looks: he is not alone, for he always has someone next to him.

We can compare this to a person who gets married and he is in his first marriage. They told him before his wedding that he will have to spend the night at home instead of being in the *beis midrash* at night, because there is a *mitzvah* to make one's wife happy in the first year of marriage. So he's in his house every night with his wife for 3 hours. What does he do during all this time with her? Does he talk to her, or does he not talk to her? What should he talk about with her? Should he open up the *sefarim* and tell her the ideas there? (Should he speak only Torah with her? If he does this he might end up bringing her into the Kolel!)

What should he speak about with her? He should only speak about what interests her? He must firstly speak with her about what interests her, but if he only speaks with her about what interests her and never about what interests him, this is a level only for *tzaddikim*. Reb Ben Tzion Abba Shaul zt"l did this, but this level is not for the average person. One needs to speak with his wife both about what interests her as well as what interests him.

Now let's think about how a person should talk to Hashem. What does a person talk about with Hashem? Some people take a pen and paper before Rosh HaShanah and write down everything they will ask Hashem for, so that they don't miss a single detail and so that all their requests will be answered....

I am not saying not to do this, but we must know that talking to Hashem means to speak with Him about what you feel. When you live with someone, you talk to the other about what you feel. So too, when you live with Hashem, you talk to Him. If a person only prepares his requests of Hashem and that is all he will talk about with Hashem on Rosh HaShanah, it is a sign that he doesn't feel that He lives with him.

This way of life is a kind of life that transforms the entire person. One who tries this for a few months will see that he has transformed into an entirely different person. This is tried and tested.

The Balance Between Learning Torah and Talking To Hashem

However, sometimes when a person begins to talk to Hashem, he becomes enmeshed in their personal requests of Hashem, such as success in learning Torah. The person asks of Hashem for help in understanding Tosafos, because that is what they are in middle of right now.

On one hand, our intellect must be immersed in Torah learning, and one must learn the Gemara with clarity and with review, making sure that he knows his learning. But our Sages teach us: “There is a time for Torah and a time for prayer.” Torah without prayer is not Torah, and prayer without Torah is not prayer. One must be immersed in learning Torah, day and night, but a person also has to set aside time every day to talk to Hashem.

Some ask, “How can we do both? Either a person learns Torah, or he talks to Hashem – but there is no time for both.” But just like a person is able to see and talk at the same time, so can a person do these two things at once. It is possible for a person to learn Torah as well as work on his closeness to Hashem.

We must caution that all that we have said thus far, about developing a relationship with Hashem and talking to Him each day, is a matter which must not compromise on the time one spends on his Torah learning. We are emphasizing this point because when one is ignorant of this, it has caused many a downfall.

One must be very careful that his relationship with Hashem is not taking its toll on his Torah learning and causing him to slacken off from learning. If one’s intense bond with Hashem is weakening his Torah learning, it is a sign that something is wrong with his own bond with Hashem and it is incomplete. One must have a deep bond with Hashem and with learning his Torah. (In addition, one must also have a deep love for every Jew, although we did not address this point here.)

In Summary and In Conclusion

To conclude, let us summarize this discussion. We explained two parts of preparing for the *Yom HaDin*. The first part is to awaken a *yirah* of the *Yom HaDin*, and the second part is to feel a bond with Hashem; to feel that He is with you, always.

We explained that in order to gain *yirah*, one should awaken his painful memories of this past year and relive the experiences. Then you can feel what it means to have *yirah*. A person needs to do this when he has quiet and when is alone, and feel this *yirah*.

The second part is to awaken one’s bond with Hashem. First one must review clearly in his mind that Hashem is everywhere. Whenever you find yourself alone remind yourself that Hashem is with you. In addition, talk to Hashem throughout the day. Regarding this point, the *Mesillas Yescharim* says that one can talk to Hashem “as a man talks to a friend”.

May we merit to approach the *Yom HaDin* with both of these parts - *yirah* and *kirvas Hashem* – and through this may we merit the *siyata d'shmaya* to be written for a good year, in the book of the righteous, and all of *Klal Yisrael*. Amen, and Amen.

1.15 | Joy On Rosh HaShanah⁵⁵

Awe and Joy on the Day of Judgment

Rosh HaShanah is the *Yom HaDin* (the day of judgment). Is there any heart that does not tremble from it? Just as a person is afraid when he stands in court, so is Rosh HaShanah a time of trepidation, where we stand before the King of all kings. There is a natural fear that all people have of the judgment of Rosh HaShanah, each person on his own level.

But on the other hand, Rosh HaShanah is also described as a joyous time. It is written, “*Eat from the fattest foods and drink sweet beverages...and do not be sad, for the joy of Hashem is their splendor.*”⁵⁶ There is a *mitzvah* to eat, drink, and be joyous, on Rosh HaShanah. Some opinions even forbid fasting on Rosh HaShanah, because it is a time of joy.

What is the joy that takes place on Rosh HaShanah? The fear of Rosh HaShanah we are all familiar with. We know it is the time where people are judged, where life and death is decided. Naturally there is a fear on this day. But it is hard to understand why Rosh HaShanah is also a joyous time. What is this happiness all about?

Joy: When Sin Is Removed

It is well-known that the Arizal said that he mainly reached his high levels of comprehension through *simchah* (joy). Let us think into this.

The simple-known reason of the Arizal’s success is because he intensely desired the Torah and he was aware of its value. It is certainly true that he valued the Torah very much, and that he appreciated holiness. The Arizal found joy in the Torah, before he became the Arizal. Now that we have his writings, it became easier for us to find joy in the Torah, but the Arizal found joy in the Torah way before he composed his writings, through his exertion in Torah and in doing the *mitzvos*. The joy he had from Torah and *mitzvos* enabled him to reach all of his great revelations.

This is the simple understanding of how the Arizal found his great joy. There is also a deeper reason, though.

It is written, “*G-d created man upright, but they seek many calculations.*”⁵⁷ Originally, man was *yosbor* (upright), and after Adam’s sin, man fell from the state of *yosbor* into the state of seeking “many calculations”: all kinds of rationalizations that lead to sin.

⁵⁵ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/rosh-hashannah-0001-joy-rosh-hashannah>

⁵⁶ *Nechemiah* 8:10

⁵⁷ *Koheles* 7:29

Why does man become sad? The word for “sadness” in Hebrew is “*etzev*”, from the word *atzavim*, “images”, a term for idol worship. Had Adam *HaRishon* never sinned, no one else who came after him would have been enabled to sin; there would be no sins in the world. There would be no idol worship in the world; every sin is a degree of idol worship. If we would live in a world in which there is no sin, there would be no sadness.

Sadness happens because the soul deep down is in pain that it has sinned. It is pained that it has become distanced from her Creator. (This is at the root of the matter. When we analyze the branch of the matter, it is because the body enables sadness, for the body is created from the element of earth, which is the root of sadness).

When a person is found living with Hashem, there is “*Splendor and joy in His place.*”⁵⁸ There is no place for sadness in Hashem’s abode. “One cannot come to the king in sackcloth” – this is not just because it is a dishonor to the king to come in sackcloth, but because the palace of the king is a place of joy, and sackcloth is a connotation of pain and sadness, the antithesis of joy.

A person can only be sad when he becomes distanced from the Creator. When a person sins, this causes “*timtum halev*” (blockage of the heart); there is distance between man and his Creator, and then there is sadness.

It seems to a person that he is sad because he has financial issues, or because he has a problem when it comes to raising his children or a problem with *shidduchim*. But the deep reason of why sadness appears is because of a person’s sins. The sins create a distance between the person and Hashem. A person’s sins might make their appearance in the form of problems with children or with *shidduchim*, but those things are just the garments that are covering over the real issue. Those problems are not the root of the sadness.

The true joy that a person can know of in his life is: to reach a situation in which he is cleansed from sin. This is when one purifies himself from sins, through doing true *teshuvah*. The Rambam says that the *teshuvah* must be on the level in which Hashem testifies on the person that he would never commit the sin again.⁵⁹ When one does genuine *teshuvah*, he becomes happy.

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.

The Arizal was thus joyous when he learned Torah, because he purified himself from any sins, so that he would be able to learn Torah with proper fervor and awe; together with his exertion in learning. This brought him to joy, and from this joy, he reached awesome levels of comprehension.

⁵⁸ *Divrei HaYomim I: 16:27*

⁵⁹ *Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 2:2*

Joy comes from returning to our pure state, where we are cleansed from sin. When a person tries to get his happiness from external factors, it can only be temporary happiness, and it is minimal. True joy is only when a person removes from himself the reason that is responsible for all sadness in the soul – sin.

The Joy on Rosh HaShanah – Passing Before The King

This also helps us understand the joy that is present on Rosh HaShanah. Although Rosh HaShanah is the *Yom HaDin*, it is also a day of *simchah* (joy). The reason to be happy on Rosh HaShanah is because it is the day where “All in the world pass before Him, like sheep of a flock.” It is one day of the year where each person is granted a ‘ticket’ to enter before Him.

Throughout the rest of the year, only *tzaddikim* have access to Hashem’s palace that is opened to them. (They feel Hashem simply at all times. This is the meaning of the 36 *tzaddikim* who greet the *Shechinah* each day – to receive the *Shechinah* is to palpably sense Hashem). A regular person cannot enter into that ‘place’ during the rest of the year. But there is one day a year where all people are given the right to enter before the King of the world: Rosh HaShanah. On this day, there is no one who cannot come before the King of all Kings. When one merits to be with the King of all Kings and to be close to Him, he is filled with joy.

The joy on Rosh HaShanah is not about the fact that it is *Yom HaDin* (although from a deeper perspective, there is also a concept of having joy in the concept of the *Yom HaDin*; but we won’t discuss this). The *Yom HaDin* evokes fear, not joy. Which part of Rosh HaShanah evokes joy? The fact that it is a day of great closeness with Hashem. When a person is close to Hashem - there is “*Splendor and joy in His place.*”

Thus, the reason to be joyous on Rosh HaShanah is, because a person is passing before the King of the world.

Preparing For Rosh HaShanah With Both Fear and Joy

If a person never thinks on Rosh HaShanah that it is the day where we are guaranteed to pass in such close proximity before Hashem, he is missing the joy of this day. One must therefore prepare before Rosh HaShanah, on two different levels. Firstly, one must reflect on how it is the *yom hadin*, where all people will be judged for every single action; the more a person has purified his heart, the more he will have a sense of fear. Secondly, one must realize that it is the day where we declare Hashem as king – and all people are granted the right to enter before Him.

Hashem is scrutinizing each person on Rosh HaShanah, and there is no one who goes unnoticed. The simple understanding of this is that it refers to the judgment. But the deeper meaning of it is that Hashem counts each person lovingly, like a father who loves to see his children, like a king who

enjoys seeing his people. There is a desire from Hashem, so to speak, to see each of His children, and that is why each person is scrutinized before Him.

There is no day where we are so guaranteed to feel close to Hashem as on Rosh HaShanah! If a person only prepared for Rosh HaShanah with a sense of dread of the *Yom HaDin*, but he is not aware of the joy of this day, he might merit a good judgment, but he will be missing the point of this day: the fact that Hashem is more fully revealed, in the minds and hearts, of all of us.

Crying On Rosh HaShanah

Of the ten days of repentance, it is written, “*Seek Hashem where He is found, call out to Him where He is close.*”⁶⁰ This begins on Rosh HaShanah. How does it begin? What does it look like? The time that a person enters before the Creator is where the closeness begins. It is the root of all closeness to Hashem of the rest of the year.

In the writings of the Arizal, it is brought that if a person suddenly finds his eyes brimming with tears on Rosh HaShanah (and thereafter), it is a sign that he is being judged at that moment. (This is only true if it comes suddenly, and not if a person is crying because of the words he is saying in *davening* or from any of the singing and humming.) Why indeed does the person start crying at that time when he is being judged? Simply speaking, it is because the soul fears the judgment. When there is fear, there is crying. But from a deeper perspective, this cannot be the reason. When a person is very afraid, he feels so paralyzed that can't even cry. If someone encounters a lion, he does not cry. He becomes paralyzed out of fear, to the point that he cannot even feel anything.

Once someone asked the Kotzker zt”l to explain to him what *yiras Hashem* (fear of G-d) is. The Kotzker asked him, “Did you ever encounter a lion?” The person answered, “Yes.” The Kotzker asked him, “And what was going through your mind?” The person said, “I stood there like a stone. I couldn't even think straight because I was so frozen.” *Yiras Hashem* is when a person reaches a situation where he is so nullified to Hashem that he doesn't feel a thing.

We are used to thinking that *Yiras Hashem* means simply “fear”. It is true that it is fear, but that is only one step in *Yiras Hashem*. The last step of *Yiras Hashem* is for a person to feel nothing else other than the reality of Hashem. When there is crying on Rosh HaShanah because it is the *Yom HaDin*, it can be stemming from fear, but it can also be stemming from the feeling of standing before the King of all Kings, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

Even more so, sensing the reality of Hashem can cause a person to cry, when one who has yearnings to sense Him.

⁶⁰ *Yeshayahu 55:6*

The Joy of Being Close To Hashem – Only For One Who Wants It

In order for a person to feel the joy on Rosh HaShanah of being close with Hashem, one needs to lead a lifestyle in which he is searching for closeness with Hashem. This is because a person can only become happy upon filling the void he knows he must fill. You can only appreciate something when you realize how much you lacked it.

To illustrate, if you give a person a new printer right after his old printer broke, he will be very happy. He realized he was missing a printer and he appreciates the new printer. But if you give someone a printer and he has no need for it, he has no idea what to do with it, and perhaps he will look to sell it, and it is a bother to him.

If a person is not looking to be closer to Hashem before Rosh HaShanah, he will have a hard time being happy on Rosh HaShanah with the fact that it is a day where we are closer to Hashem. He has never longed for this closeness, so he has no interest in it; why should he be happy?

The Arizal said that if a person does not cry on Rosh HaShanah, it is a sign that his soul is in need of rectification. If someone doesn't cry, it shows that he is not looking to become closer to Hashem. If he would be looking to be close to Hashem, he would become seized with emotion as soon as he realizes that it is the *Yom HaDin*, for he would realize that he is standing before Hashem, and he would begin to cry from this. If he does not cry, it must be a sign that he is not awaiting the closeness.

When parents marry off their child and they escort the child to the chuppah, they cry tears of emotion. They raised this child for 20 years, and now they are bringing him to the chuppah; they cry from this. But if a father walks his child to the chuppah and he shows no signs of emotion, perhaps it is because there is not a good relationship between the father and son. If they have a normal relationship, surely there is joy when the father walks him down.

In order for a person to be joyous on Rosh HaShanah, he must await for the closeness with Hashem already from before this day.

Why, indeed, is this the joy of Rosh HaShanah? Why is it specifically Rosh HaShanah that this joy is present? It is because man was created on Rosh HaShanah. Man remained upright until he sinned. On Rosh HaShanah, the original light that was present on the first day of Creation returns. It is the original light where man was "*yoshor*". If a person throughout the year is seeking to return to being *yoshor*, when it comes Rosh HaShanah and the light of *yoshor* is shining, he is joyous from this, because a man who is *yoshor* is connected to the Creator. But if one is not searching for this, he has nothing to be joyous about on Rosh HaShanah.

Inspiration Is Not Enough To Become Close To Hashem

Now we will try to make the matters here more practical.

Naturally, when it comes the days of *Selichos* and the ten days of *teshuvah*, every person wants to be inspired, to grow higher, and become closer to Hashem. But how *do* we become closer to Hashem?

Is it through hearing an inspiring *mussar shmuess* from a certain speaker?

Compare this to the following. A person wants to get up in the morning on time, so he sets his alarm. He hears the alarm ringing the next morning. As he's asleep, he smashes down the button of the alarm clock and continues to sleep. The alarm rings a few minutes later, and he turns it off again. A person might "get up" from sleeping, but he's still half-asleep, and sometimes even after waking up he falls totally back asleep. A person might get awakened, but soon, after he is sleeping again.

If a person really wants to "get up" and not fall back asleep again, the first thing he must do when he gets up is: To jump out of the bed! If he remains lying in bed, who knows when he will get up.

The lesson from this is that that when it comes Yomim Noraim and we are inspired because of the coming *Yom HaDin*, it will not be enough if we receive inspiration. Hearing a *mussar shmuess* is like hearing the alarm clock in the morning only to go back to sleep afterwards. It might inspire a person for two days, and in the best case, it lasts until after Rosh HaShanah. Often by the time the person it is the next *davening*, the inspiration is already gone.

If we want inspiration to last, we all know that hearing a half-hour *mussar shmuess* will not do it. A *mussar shmuess* at best can help that people shouldn't live entirely in a spiritual slumber for their entire life. But in order to have real and lasting inspiration on an ongoing basis, one needs to build for himself a kind of life in which he is seeking closeness to Hashem, throughout the course of the year.

There Are No Shortcuts

When the convert came before the sage Shamai and he asked to be taught the entire Torah on one foot, he was pushed away. Imagine if we would ask Shamai to give a *mussar shmuess* to us - I think he would also push everyone away. Why? Because he would know that it is pointless. What can you say already in a half hour? Can you change a person in a half hour?

If a person wants to know *halachah*, then perhaps learning the *halachah* for a half hour can be enough. But can a person finish the entire tractate of Gemara he is learning, by setting aside a half hour for it? Would he ask anyone to teach him the entire tractate in a half hour? I do not know of anyone who would give such a *shiur*. Maybe he would hope that they ask him to continue the *shiur* after a half hour, but nobody learns an entire tractate in a half hour.

The avodah of a person on this earth is like a "tractate" that lasts for 70 years of our life. What then is the point of a *mussar shmuess* that lasts for a half hour? I am not poking fun *chas v'shalom* at a half-hour *mussar shmuess*. It is learning Torah, and it certainly causes some awakening in a person. But when compared to how much we need to do on this world, it is almost nothing.

People want to come to hear an inspiring lecture, they want to grow from it and change from it. *Klal Yisrael* wants to become closer to their Father in heaven. But it is not possible to actually change from hearing a speech and in such a short amount of time.

Therefore, I did not come here to give you tips on how to merit a good judgment. There is no such advice. Anyone who thinks he can hear in two minutes of advice like this is mistaken, because life is a lot deeper than what it appears to be.

The ‘advice’ to merit a good judgment is: From the beginning of the year, until the end of the year, work on becoming closer to Hashem.

It is well-known that the Noam Elimelech promised that whoever will come pray by his grave will merit that he will not die without doing *teshuvah*. I met a person once who was about to go to the grave of the Noam Elimelech. I said to him: “I can give you a similar guarantee, but on one condition.” He asked me, “And what is the condition?” I said to him, “I do not have the power of the Noam Elimelech. I can just guarantee you that if you do *teshuvah* every day, you will die after having done *teshuvah*!”

People like to search for the “easy road” in things. A person naturally does not feel the strength to do *teshuvah* every day, so he looks for some “*segulah*” that will do the trick. He will go to the grave of a *tzaddik* where there is some guarantee, and after that, he will continue to do as he pleases – and the Noam Elimelech surely didn’t include in his guarantee that if someone simply does whatever he pleases that he will merit to die after doing *teshuvah*.

If a person has tried his best yet he has still encountered failure, it is then that going to the grave of a *tzaddik* can help him. But there is no easy road in life; there are no shortcuts.

It comes Erev Rosh HaShanah and people want advice to merit a good judgment and to be found meritorious in the *Yom HaDin*. But we must understand that the *Yom HaDin* is an issue of all of our life on this world, and there are no shortcuts to take in order to get by it. In all areas of life, we must know that there are no shortcuts or easy roads. To build for ourselves a true life, an entire lifetime is required.

In Conclusion

It is my hope that you have taken out one single point from all of these words [be prepared to work hard]. If a person loses his job, either he can give up and fall into a depression and take to his bed all day, or he can get up and find himself a new job, where he will work again. The only point that is to be gleaned from the words of this speech is: that you try to seek out a path for the rest of the year, from beginning until end. It should be a path that leads you to palpable closeness with Hashem, the closeness that is rooted in Rosh HaShanah.

Hashem should help each person find the true path that will build him, from beginning until the end of the year, and that all of us should merit to be written and sealed for a good

1.16 | “One Thing I Requested”⁶¹

What Is The Most Important Thing That You Want In Life?

The days of Elul are here, and a new year is before us, approaching. There is no Jewish soul during these days who isn't inspired at least on a minimal level. Every Jew has some feeling, at least a tiny feeling, to do *teshuvah* (repentance), to change.

Let us try to understand a bit more about this matter, so that we can have a clearer and deeper understanding of it.

Everyone has many things in his life that he wants. A husband wants his wife to be a good wife to him, a wife wants to have a good husband, and they both want good children, good health, ample livelihood, and a comfortable home. Each person has many more things to add onto this list as well. Now let's come to a person and ask him: “Now that you've listed all these things that you want, from all of these 50 things you wrote down, what do you want the most?”

There's a saying in Israel going around, “*Ha'Ikar, Berius*”, “The main thing, is health.” A 20-year old isn't concerned about health, though. Only when people get older do they start to worry about their health. And if they have good health, what, then, do people think about? Happiness.

The truth is, however, that even if a person would have both complete health and happiness, he would be in a lot of danger [spiritually speaking]. Why? Because he would grow complacent and feel, “I have everything!”

Every person, as we said, has many desires. But what is the main thing that a person wants in life? One needs to think about this at times. It's possible for a person to live 70 or 80 years yet not even once did he think, “What is the thing I truly want, more than anything, in my life?”

Of course, a person might give a quick answer to this. But it won't be truthful. It is not a question that you can answer so quickly. It needs more than half a year's worth of time to answer!

If Elijah the Prophet would reveal himself to a person and say to him: “Hashem has decreed that whatever you asked for, will happen. You can now ask one thing, as in the verse “*One thing I requested from Hashem, that is which I sought*”. What would a person ask? That his oldest daughter should become engaged? That the bank shouldn't put his house in foreclosure? What would a person ask for...?

As long as a person hasn't yet thought about this, he remains unclear about the main point of life. If he is unclear about it, he is like a person who has many important businesses yet he is unaware of what his main one is. He will invest most of his money in the businesses that are less important, and

7אש השנה 010 – מציאות הרצון האמיתי שלך 61

the main business will be financially neglected for the most part. His main business will surely fail with this approach – clear and simple.

So a person first needs to become clear what the main point of life is that he is living for. The question is: How much is a person willing to invest, in order to figure out what he truly wants in life?

When a person goes for a blood test and the results don't come back good, he goes back for more blood tests, until they tell him, "We see that something here is abnormal. But we don't know exactly what it is. Maybe go to a certain doctor for this, Dr. X. He is an expert and he will almost definitely know what the problem is." In such a situation, a person would be prepared to spend much money in order to find out what the illness is in his body. It is directly affecting his health and his entire life. Now: How much is a person willing to invest in knowing what he truly wants in life?

If a person is sure that his main interest in life is money, a nice house, a nice car, or getting lots of honor, then he also has a problem to deal with. It is clear that such a person is living for a purpose that is clearly not the purpose of life, and he will have to deal with this problem.

The first thing, then, that a person needs to do, is to try to figure out to himself what the main thing is that he wants in life. After that he can begin to understand on what level his *Avodas Hashem* is.

Before a person figures this out, chances are that he is living in a totally delusional realm. He might be a person who has regularly fixed times for learning Torah, for an hour at night or more; he might regularly give *tzedakah* and try to be a *baal chessed* and to host guests, and many other wonderful things. But what does he really want in life? It is not *tzedakah*, hosting guests, or the hour of learning Torah he has every night. Those things rank at either #9, #17, or #36 on his list of what he considers "the most important things that I want"....

What is the main point in life that a person wants more than anything else?

A Big Surprise About The Reward In The World To Come

We all *Baruch Hashem* do the *mitzvos*, for the most part. We make effort to *daven*, to put on *tefillin*, to wear *tallis* and *tzitzis*, to keep Shabbos, etc. What will be our reward for all of this? We will be paid back with spiritual reward. But if a person doesn't care too much for the spiritual, he can't enjoy the reward for all his *mitzvos*! He will come upstairs to the High Heavenly Court and there is nothing physical there, only spirituality. But that is not what he wants, so he will remain there with nothing.

If a person wanted a nice car more than anything else, after 120 when he goes upstairs, with millions of *mitzvos* at his side, he will be told: "Here is payment for all of the millions of *mitzvos* that you did. Here is your greatest wish: the new car which came out this year." Understandably, he will

not want to get into that car, realizing that he has lost his entire spiritual reward! This is what is meant in the verse, “*A man according to his praise.*”

This is not some kind of joke, and it is not a mere thought of *mussar*.

If anyone is working at a job and he finds out that he will not get paid at the end of the month, what would he do...? What happens if a person finds out after 70 years of living that he will not get any payment for anything he did? Does anyone have a guaranteed ‘insurance’ in the World To Come that he will get paid for all the *mitzvos* he did?

Compare this to a child who did something good, so his father buys him a new car as a gift. What can the child do with the car? Only after 16 years old can he get a permit to drive. Right now, he can’t do anything with the car. Hashem is loyal to pay back anyone with reward, but who says that the person when he gets upstairs will be able to use the reward that was given to him?

Imagine a person who works for someone for a month and then at the end of the month, he is given a pair of glasses as his payment. He doesn’t need glasses, he can see quite fine. This is not considered payment to him, because he doesn’t need the glasses.

We all *Baruch Hashem* make effort to do the right actions, each person on his own level. But is it clear to any of us what we want? If a person wanted what they will give to him in the Next World, he can enjoy it as reward. But if this isn’t what he really wanted in his life, he cannot enjoy his reward in Heaven, because this is not what he wanted. *Chas v’shalom*, it can be the realization of the verse, “*He pays back his enemies....to destroy them.*”

Knowing What You Really Want In Life

Every person needs to figure out for himself if Hashem is satisfied with his actions or not, and this is a very important issue to know. But that is a second question to know. The first question one needs to answer for himself is: “What do I want from *myself*??”

Here is an example from the physical world to illustrate what we mean. Sometimes there is a boy who is 19, 20, 21 or 23, and he has no idea what trade he wants to learn. To our chagrin, his parents do not really understand his soul and what he really needs, and what his true interests are. A year goes by and he still hasn’t decided what he wants to do with his life; perhaps he has some options now, but he hasn’t yet decided. He learns about a certain trade for another half a year, then he stops, thinking that it’s better to switch to a different field. The parents are at a loss of what to do. They are prepared to spend all of the money in the world, just so that their son should become focused and learn something. But the boy doesn’t even know what he wants from himself.

In the physical world, it is clear that if a person doesn’t know what he wants, he won’t be able to make something out of his life. How can it be, then, that a person can remain unclear about the entire meaning of his life altogether?!

Of course, a person can say: “I want Torah, mitzvos, and good deeds.” But is that really what the person wants? Or does he want other things than this too [which he considers more important]? A person might do good deeds, learn Torah, and keep the mitzvos, and surely his deeds are important, but what does he really want in his life?

Dovid HaMelech testified about himself what he wanted: “*And as for me, closeness to Hashem, to me, is good.*”⁶² There is a well-known question: Was it only ‘good’ for Dovid HaMelech? Is it ‘not good’ for everyone else? The answer is: No! Most people do not want closeness with Hashem! Therefore, for them, it is not called “good”. Most people, if you would come to them ask them if they want to have the reward of dwelling all day with Hashem (as Dovid HaMelech says) and nothing else, they will say: “I don’t want the *mitzvos*, or the reward.”

A story is told over about one of the *tzaddikim* who was asked to be shown what Gehinnom (hell) is and what Gan Eden (paradise) is. They showed him a person sitting with a *shtender* and learning. They said to him: “This is Gan Eden, and it is also Gehinnom.” He didn’t understand what this meant; either it’s Gan Eden, or Gehinnom, but how could it be both? They explained it to him: “It is very simple. If a person loved to learn Torah, this will be Gan Eden for him. If he did not love to learn, for him, this is Gehinnom.”

Gehinnom is experienced by one who never connected to the heavenly realm, and he remains connected to this lower realm. What happens the moment he dies? If all he wanted his whole life was money, a car, a nice home, and other worldly desires, what happens the moment he dies? He has nothing to do when he goes upstairs. He will have no car and no house there, nothing. That is his Gehinnom – the fact that none of his desires can be actualized.

It is certainly possible that a person learned Torah (Baruch Hashem), put on *tefillin* every day, gave *tzedakah* and hosted guests, but in his heart, he wanted other things entirely. He doesn’t even understand what the issue is. He would come to his Rav and ask: “What sin did I commit? Where is it written that I did anything wrong?” But it doesn’t have to be written anywhere – rather, he’s in a situation that is entirely the wrong place to be in.

This is not another side issue, but a root issue, of where a person is living from, what he wants, what he breathes from morning until night, what interests him, what he is involved with in his life.

Every person has *ruchniyus* (spirituality), but the question is, how much percentage it takes up in his life, and how much of a percentage of balance there is between his spiritual side of life and his material side of life. Where is he found? Is he 99% found in the material, and only 1% in the spiritual? Or the opposite? Or are the percentages different?

A person gets up in the morning, and until he goes to sleep at night he is thinking about the material side to life, such as making money and his health. Only at night does he grab an hour to learn Torah (in the best scenario, that is). If he is worried about his spiritual situation, he uses even more time for Torah study, but since he only cares for his material situation, he doesn’t.

⁶² *Tebillim* 73:28

There are some people who want to feel good about themselves, so they give *maaser* (a tenth of their earnings). Once I was speaking to a wealthy Jew, who entered into a million-dollar business deal. I asked him: “For what reason do you need this?” He answered, “So that I’ll be able to give *maaser* from all the profit.”

I said to him: “You didn’t do it to give *maaser*. You did it because you wanted to make millions of dollars. But to quiet your subconscious, you tell yourself that you’ll give away a tenth of it for Hashem. If you would have really entered this investment for the sake of giving *tzedakah*, for Hashem, why are you only giving away a tenth of the profits? Why not 100% of the profit? Obviously it must be because you are really doing it to become a millionaire. Your heart isn’t at peace with this, though, because deep down you know it stems from a lust for money. So you are trying to ‘bribe’ Hashem, by giving away a tenth of the profit.

“But this won’t help you. Hashem knows exactly the reason why you entered this business endeavor. It is not because you don’t have what to eat and you need to support your family, or because you really want to give it all to *tzedakah* and increase the honor of Heaven. It is simply a desire for more money. Giving *maaser* from it is just the excuse.”

The deepest, most fundamental question in life for each person is: “What do I really want?”

If a person answers that what he really wants is *ruchniyus* (spirituality), he should think of the following: If that is really what he wants, then why doesn’t it take up his mind the entire day? If a person has an affidavit in the bank which he doesn’t succeed in finishing by the end of the month, he thinks about it the entire day. If a person has a child who is ill, Heaven forbid, he searches for the right doctors and healthcare and it occupies his mind the entire day. Not because it’s ‘written’ anywhere to do so, but because this is what he wants.

If a person claims that he really wants *ruchniyus*, he should think about it for most of the hours of the day, besides for anything else necessary that he needs to think about, which he needs to take care of. In the end of day, there are other things which also must occupy our mind, due to the various responsibilities of life. But in spite of that reality, there is one main point which you should want with all your heart.

Ruchniyus Should Be Real To You

Each and every one of us wants, with Hashem’s help, to merit a good, sweet year. Who doesn’t? On Rosh HaShanah night, everyone is blessing each other to have a *shanah tovah u’mesukah*, a good sweet year. But does anyone think that the year will suddenly become transformed into a good, sweet year, just because his friend said so?

Let’s imagine for ourselves a person standing in front of the Heavenly court in judgment, and it is decreed upon him that he must die. His friend comes to him and says to him, “May you have a happy, sweet new year.” Will anyone think this will help?

The problem is that we have gotten used to a lifestyle where the spiritual side of life is ambiguous and unreal to us.

When two people lift a glass of wine together and declare, “*L’chaim*” (To life), does that really mean that we are given a new year of life? How exactly does that work? When we are dealing with the spiritual, suddenly things seem unclear to us.

Think for a moment: If a person owes a thousand dollars to his friend, and he comes to him and says “May it be the will of Hashem, as if I have paid you”, will his friend accept that? Will it solve anything? No! Why is it then that when it comes to the spiritual side of life, suddenly people believe that eating all of the *simanim* will make everything good? We eat different foods on Rosh HaShanah night, confident that we will merit a good year, in their merit – but where do we get this from?

Our words here are aiming at something deeper of what the intention should be in this custom, and not G-d forbid to nullify the custom of eating these foods. The point we are driving at here is that we have gotten used to being imaginative and unrealistic about the spiritual world, without approaching it as real.

A person may think that just because he has done certain customs on Rosh HaShanah night, everyone at the table will have a good year! But he did the same thing last year, and it didn’t work. His blessing didn’t ‘work’ for everyone. It is unrealistic to assume that the coming year won’t have any troubles in it, and that everyone will have it all good and pleasant, in their health, livelihood, etc.

The point here is very basic and fundamental: *Ruchniyus* (spirituality) has to become a simple reality in our lives, no less real than the material side of life. If *ruchniyus* would be a clear reality to us, our desires for *ruchniyus* would be realistic, in turn.

But when *ruchniyus* is cloudy, unknown, and unclear to us, when it is not tangible to us, this causes us to be immersed in the material side of life, and *ruchniyus* to us is then limited to all kinds of various *segulos* (spiritual charms). A person will think, for example, that if he gives a fifth of his earnings to *tzedakah*, says certain *tefillos* on *Motzei Shabbos* and also gives some *tzedakah* to *Vaad HaRabbonim*, then, everything will be fine. But he is not living this *ruchniyus* in the same way he experiences the material side of his life.

Changing Our Life

Each of us has already been through many Rosh HaShanahs. Does it help anyone, having been through Rosh HaShanah many times?

Maybe you’ll say: “We have good hopes for this year. We hope this year will be a better one.”

One year, about one or two days after Rosh HaShanah, I was walking in the street and I thought to myself: “The world looks exactly as it did, when it was the 28th of Elul. Nothing has changed at all!” Does anyone think that after Rosh HaShanah anything will change? Where will this sudden change come from?

Now let's come and think about this: We know that life continues. We aren't little children anymore who are 2 or 3 years old. Do we want the coming year to look like the past year? Or do we want to change one day?

If a person has a business that isn't making any profit, and his wife comes and tells him, "Enough. This business used to be doing well, and it seemed profitable. But now you need to spend 2 or 3 years learning a different trade, so that we can support our family, with Hashem's help." In the same way, we must change the entire direction of our life. It is not one detail we have to change, but our entire life.

In simple words, a person needs to reach the conclusion of what he really, truly wants. If he discovers that he really wants material comfort, he must change the direction of his life and desire the spiritual. And if he says that he really wants *ruchniyus*, he should examine his life and see if everything he wants throughout the day is matching up with his desire for *ruchniyus*.

No one can succeed 100% in changing, because no one in the world is perfect. But it is always upon a person to keep checking himself to see if he is getting closer to the goal of life, or if his actions are contradicting the goals which we are supposed to want.

First, we need to clarify what we want, and after that we can begin to examine our actions. A person gets up in the morning and says *Modeh Ani*— does he really want to say it, or not? If he eats before *davening*, does that match up with what he really wants in life? If he learns Torah, does this fit in with what he wants or not? One can take apart all aspects of his schedule and keep seeing if they fit his spiritual goals in life or not. The point is to become aware of what you truly want in life, and to then inspect all your deeds and see if they are aligned with your goal.

The point of this is not to start changing everything you do, from this day onward. Rather, there are some things which require quick change, and some things which you will only be able to gradually improve in. Compare this to a person who has a house in need of repair, and he doesn't have enough money to get all the repairs done. He must sit down and make a list of what's most important to fix first, then what's second to most important, etc. Every year he can do another repair, in order of preference. Slowly as each year passes, the house can get more and more repaired.

Dealing With The Truth About Life

If a person doesn't clarify to himself what he wants in his life, he has no reason to live!

Once there was a Jew who passed away on Erev Yom Kippur, and when the Brisker Rav heard about it, he said, "He was born a fool, and he died a fool." Someone there who was close to him (perhaps it was one of his children) exclaimed: "Rebbi! Of all times to speak *lashon hora*! It's Erev Yom Kippur!!" The Rav zt"l responded: "You don't understand what I said. I tried finding merit for this person, who led a sinful life. The only single merit that I could find about this person was that he was born on Erev Yom Kippur as a fool, and he remained foolish until he died, so there is no complaint we can have on him."

But does anyone think that this would be a true way to live? Is that how we should lead our lives? Would our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov, and the rest of the leaders throughout the generations, live this way? Have the times changed so much that people now consider priorities to be secondary, and what was secondary has now become priority? Has everything become completely upside-down? This is not an inspirational lecture for Rosh HaShanah, nor is it a program. I am presenting to you a very simple question which each person needs to ask himself: “What do I really want? Am I taking the right direction in my life?”

The fact that most people don’t want to think about this and that there is almost no one who speaks about this publicly doesn’t show us that it’s not true. It is the truth and there is nowhere to run to from it. It is as unpleasant as thinking about the day of death, which no one likes to think about, yet that doesn’t help us evade death. People die even if they never think about it; it is useless to avoid thinking about it. The same is true for our question of what we are living for.

The issue is if we are truly prepared to deal with the truth in life. One needs to ask himself: “Do I believe that there is a Creator of the world, or not? Yes. Do I believe He gave the Torah at Har Sinai? Yes. Do I believe that there is an eternity? Yes. Do I believe that there is no physicality in the eternal world? Yes. Do I believe that in the eternal world there is only One alone – the Creator of the world, together with His Torah? Yes. Is my life really aligned with all of this?”

Take apart all the parts of your life, bit by bit, and inspect them truthfully, to see if they are matching up to the truths you recognize. If one hasn’t yet made this clarification of the truth, he should begin to do so, starting today. Sit and learn the *sefarim* that deal with this topic, or speak to Torah scholars who are knowledgeable in this topic, those who know what the truth is. But whatever option you choose, begin to do it, immediately! Now!

We all know that there is a truth, that there is a Creator of the world. The question is if a person is prepared to align his lifestyle with this truth. We live in a world where there are many well-known truths that all people know about, yet many live in a way that is totally opposite than this knowledge. The world today is not lacking in this knowledge; it is not found at the other side of the Sambatyon. Most people know the truths, but they behave differently.

When Rosh HaShanah arrives, the Rav in the shul might get up and say a nice idea for Rosh HaShanah. Everyone will praise the *derasha* and say how good it was. But what did the idea help? Perhaps everyone listening fulfills a *mitzvah* of learning Torah for two minutes. But did it change anyone? Did a person become a different person from listening to the *Dvar Torah* he heard, as the Rambam says, that one who does *teshuvah* is not the same person anymore and he becomes an entirely new being?

I hope that you understand that I did not say here anything new, not even one thing. So if they are not my own novel words, you should agree to act upon them. Don’t do it because I said to, but because each of you alone knows it on your own.

May we merit with the help of Hashem, each of us, to align our lifestyle with the goal and purpose of life.

1.17 | *Avoiding Self-Absorption On Rosh HaShanah*⁶³

“May We Be Like The Head, And Not Like The Tail”

Rosh HaShanah contains the word “*rosh*”, a hint to the concept of *koived rosh*, “seriousness”. Almost everyone approaches Rosh HaShanah with some level of *koived rosh*, a sense of seriousness; each on his own level. In childhood, Rosh HaShanah is experienced as a time to taste sweet foods and to get candies in shul. When you get a bit older, Rosh HaShanah is more about *niggunim*, singing, and the sounds of the *shofar*. The Satan becomes confused on Rosh HaShanah by the *shofar*; and in the same way, so are there souls who are also “confused” from the *shofar* – they are confused about what Rosh HaShanah is all about.

We say on Rosh HaShanah, when eating the *simanim*, “May we be like a head, and not like a tail.” If a person doesn’t merit to become like a head, and instead he becomes like the tail, it means that he becomes confused from these days, because he lives in a state of *katnus* (small-mindedness and immaturity). He may be simply terrified from Rosh HaShanah because it is the *Yom HaDin* (Day of Judgment), but he doesn’t approach it with seriousness, with *koived rosh*.

On Rosh HaShanah, we are meant to become elevated over the level of our physical body, and to rise to the level of “*rosh*”, the “head” – which refers to our beginning point (*raishis*), which is our *neshamah* (Divine soul), our Divine true, inner essence. That is what it means to become like a “head”, and to not become like a tail.

How Our Neshamah Views Rosh HaShanah

Thus, on Rosh HaShanah, we are meant to access the view from our *neshamah*, towards this day.

The view of the *neshamah* towards Rosh HaShanah contains two major parts: It sees Rosh HaShanah as a day of *malchiyus*, to recognize and declare Hashem’s dominion over the world, and it sees Rosh HaShanah as the *Yom HaDin*. Let us consider first how we should view the “*Yom HaDin*” aspect of Rosh HaShanah and what this should evoke in us.

Yom HaDin – Being Afraid For The Fate Of All Other Jews

The *Yom HaDin* means that we are all examined by Hashem; as we say in the tefillos of Rosh HaShanah, “like sheep passing before their Master, in one sweep.” There is a personal judgment for each person, and there is also a general judgment for the Jewish people, on Rosh HaShanah.

7אש השנה 062 – מעין יום הדין הגדול הנורא 63

Any person on Rosh HaShanah who has a little fear of this day will have a fear of the *Yom HaDin*; he is afraid to die before his time, he is afraid of his fate this year, and he worries for his needs, of the difficulties of this world. Any sensible person feels fear on this day.

But this fear is only about one's own private life. A person might also fear for his spiritual needs; and for his family members, and for those whom he loves and is close to. But if this his entire fear on Rosh HaShanah, he is really just being self-absorbed! The more inner fear to have on Rosh HaShanah is not a kind of self-focused worry, but to think about others and to feel concerned for them. One must think that everyone is being judged on Rosh HaShanah, not just him.

If each person is only thinking about himself and worrying for himself, he is then judged individually, because he is only concerned for himself, so the judgment will become more focused on him...

On Rosh HaShanah, one needs to the access a more inner part of his soul, where a person recognizes that he does not live for himself, but for others. This is true both when it comes to physical matters and spiritual matters. Such a person will merit a higher judgment, a judgment towards the general whole of *Klal Yisrael* [which is not focused individually on him and which will be far more meritorious for him.]

There is a verse, "*HaYoitzer Yachad Libam*" – "He created their hearts to be together." This refers to the "one heart" in every Jew's soul which is united for the same purpose, a point where all hearts are connected to. When one is concerned about the fate of others from this place in himself, this is a higher fear, not a self-absorbed kind of fear. It means to be concerned for the generation – both in their physical situation, and in their spiritual situation.

The Self-Introspection On Rosh HaShanah

Every person needs to become aware of what his fears are on Rosh HaShanah. One needs to ask himself: "Am I mainly concerned for the fate of myself, and my own family? Or do I also feel concern for the fate of others, on Rosh HaShanah?"

If a person is self-absorbed (whether about his physical situation or his spiritual situation), he cannot be concerned about the "*malchiyus*" aspect of Rosh HaShanah either. Even if he does, it is only for his own self-gain, and not because he is really interested in recognizing the *malchus* of Hashem. himself. A person living in such a state is not able to go beyond himself, so why should he care about Hashem's *malchus*, for its own sake? It would only interest him if there is somehow a gain for him from it.

That is why it is necessary for a person to go beyond his own self-concern, if he is to feel the main, inner *avodah* of this day - which is to recognize and declare Hashem's *malchus*.

Rosh HaShanah – A Reminder of The Future Day of Judgment

Shabbos is called a resemblance of Olam HaBa (the World To Come). In the same way, so is Rosh HaShanah, the *Yom HaDin*, a resemblance of the great day of judgment that will be in the future, which is called the “*Yom HaDin HaGadol HaGibor V’HaNora*” – the “Great, Mighty, and Awesome Day of Judgment.”⁶⁴ If a person on Shabbos does not feel that Shabbos is a resemblance of *Olam HaBa*, that means he does not ‘live’ what Shabbos is. So too, if a person on Rosh HaShanah does not feel that it resembles the future *Yom HaDin*, that means he does not experience Rosh HaShanah.

Therefore, the judgment that takes place on Rosh HaShanah is not just about this year’s fate. The entire judgment on Rosh HaShanah is there to give us some idea of what the future *Yom HaDin* will be like. The Satan becomes confused by the *shofar* on Rosh HaShanah because he thinks that the sound of the *shofar* is heralding the future *Yom HaDin*, which is the state of the redemption, so it becomes confused, thinking that we have merited the redemption and so he doesn’t accuse. Thus, the essence of Rosh HaShanah is for us to think about the great day of judgment of the future, the *Yom HaDin HaGadol HaGibor V’HaNora*.

The future *Yom HaDin* will not be about the three books that are opened on Rosh HaShanah, but about the judgment of each person all at once – as we say in the *tefillos* of Rosh HaShanah, “They all pass like sheep before their Master, in one full sweep.” Everyone will be judged, each person, all at once – it will be the sum totality of everything, which includes every single Jew.

Thus, if a person is afraid on Rosh HaShanah only for his own personal life, and not for others, he is not living the future *Yom HaDin* on Rosh HaShanah. The future *Yom HaDin* is about the collective judgment of every Jew, all at once; this is the unified level of the Jewish people, and Rosh HaShanah is therefore a time to think about this unified level of the Jewish people.

So if a person only is concerned for the judgment of this year on Rosh HaShanah, of what will happen in the coming year, he is barely scratching the surface. That is only the external part of Rosh HaShanah – this year’s fate - and its purpose is to be used in order to get to the inner layer of Rosh HaShanah, which is, the all-inclusive judgment that will be in the future.

How Malchiyos, Zichronos, Shofaros Remind Us Of The Future Day of Judgment

Declaring the verses of *Malchiyos*, *zichronos* and *shofaros* are all about this concept. It is all describing the future *Yom HaDin*.

The concept of *malchiyus* is clearly describing the complete dominion of Hashem in the future, which will be the revelation of the future *Yom HaDin*.

⁶⁴ For more about the “Great, Mighty, and Awesome Day of The Future”, refer to *Tefillah_033_The Final Judgment*

The verses of *zichronos* are not just about remembering the past, but for Hashem to remember all that will happen, even the future; and to spare us in the merit of His kingship that will be revealed in the future. If one doesn't get reminded about the future *Yom HaDin* as he says *zichronos*, and instead he only thinks about the past merits of the Jewish people, he has missed the whole point of reciting these verses. The point is to be reminded of the future *Yom HaDin*.

Shofaros as well are meant to remind us of the future *Yom HaDin*. The *shofar* we have today is a semblance of the great *shofar* that will be in the future, which will be sounded on the great *Yom HaDin* of the future.

Feeling The Collectiveness of the Jewish People

If a person is only concerned about himself and his own needs, he cannot think about any of these things. He lives in a state of *katnus* (small-mindedness and immaturity).

But when one becomes afraid of the future *Yom HaDin*, he won't think only about himself. He will have a more inclusive perspective, because he will see that he does not only live for himself, but that he is part of a greater whole. One can view himself as a soul that is part of the collective soul of Adam HaRishon. Rosh HaShanah can remind a person of the collective soul of the Jewish people, reminding a person of the beginning of creation, when all souls were part of Adam's soul.

Therefore, without revealing a true *ahavas Yisrael*, a person's heart feels separate and apart from other Jews. Without feeling a love for the collective whole of the Jewish people, one will instead be self-absorbed, because he cannot feel the collective existence of the Jewish people, and all he can feel is his own private soul.

One of the aspects of Rosh HaShanah is that it remembers the thundering sound of the *shofaros* at Har Sinai, which was when everyone stood as one and their hearts were one. So the essence of Rosh HaShanah is to access the deep point in the soul of being unified with the entire Jewish people, where all hearts are connected as one. Thus, the depth of the palpable fear on the day of Rosh HaShanah is really rooted in the endless love that binds together all of Creation. The *yirah* (fear) on Rosh HaShanah is therefore not just about the *yirah*, but about the *ahavah* (love) underneath it.

As long as a person lives only for himself, he misses the *avodah* on Rosh HaShanah. The inner *avodah* of a person on Rosh HaShanah is to enter into his "*rosh*" (head), his *raishis* (beginning point) - where all Jewish souls are connected in one unit, under the Throne of Glory.

That is the inner *avodah* contained in the *yirah* (fear) on Rosh HaShanah. To live and worry only for oneself and for one's own needs, physical or spiritual, is all a form of self-absorption. Only from being connected to everyone else's hearts on Rosh HaShanah can we feel the true fear of the judgment on this day. There must be a revealed love for all Jews on this day, and on a deeper level, for all of the creations. That is the inner essence of Rosh HaShanah.

Ahavas Yisrael: Caution and Distance On The Outside, Love On The Inside

When it comes to actually revealing the love for all other Jews, one must be cautious about this point. One must be friends with certain people, who are safe to be around spiritually, and keep a distance from others, who are of negative spiritual influence to bond with.

But all of that is only in the external part of the soul and in our external behavior towards others. On the inside, one must feel connected to every kind of Jew, no matter what his spiritual level is, and to worry and be concerned for every Jew - to feel positive towards them, and to not see any sin in them⁶⁵, as Bilaam said, “*I do not see sin in Yaakov.*” On Rosh HaShanah, one must feel connected to the collective whole of the Jewish people.

In Conclusion

That is the depth of the *yirah* (fear) on Rosh HaShanah— it is not a fear for oneself, but a fear for everyone else’s situation, and to thereby feel connected to everyone else in the Jewish people. Such *yirah* is holy, true *yirah*, because it is not entirely self-focused.

May Hashem merit all creations to be written and sealed for a good year, and that our desire should be that the entire collective whole should be written and sealed for a good year.

⁶⁵ See *The Weekly Shmuess_033_Balak - Viewing Others With A Positive Eye*

1.18 | *The Choice* ⁶⁶

The Time of Judgment For The Jewish People, the Nations, Creation, and the Angels

Parashas Nitzavim begins with the words, “And you are gathered today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d, your heads, your tribes, your elders and your officers, every man of Yisrael.” The Sages expound upon this verse that it is referring to the day of Rosh HaShanah, where all of *Klal Yisrael* is gathered together before Hashem in judgment.

The Sages teach that not only are the Jewish people judged on Rosh HaShanah, but all of the world pass before Him in judgment, like sheep before their master. Even more so, according to some opinions in the Sages (*Rosh HaShanah 16b*) even the wheat, fruit, and water are judged on this day.

Taking this further, the judgment on Rosh HaShanah is not only for this lowly World that we dwell on, but even for the higher worlds. The angels tremble from the Day of Judgment, as we recite in “*U’Nesaneh Tokef*”. In the higher and heavenly realms, the angels are being judged, on Rosh HaShanah.

The Satan Is Also Judged

One of the angels is the *Satan* (the accusing angel). It is an evil angel, but it is still an angel. The book of *Iyov* mentions the Satan and how it was sent to test Iyov with suffering, to prove that the righteous are able to stay righteous even after being tested with much suffering. When the Satan was finished testing Iyov with many difficulties, Hashem called it back to return to Him and report to Him what had transpired. Thus, the Satan is an angel and messenger of Hashem.

Thus, when Hashem judges the angels in Heaven on Rosh HaShanah, He is also judging the Satan, who is included as one of the angels, in spite of the fact that the Satan stands apart from the rest of the angels and it has the unique task itself to be the accusing angel of judgment.

But there also several other, deeper facets of how to understand the judgment upon the Satan - which affects our own *avodah* as well.

First of all, simply speaking, our merits are brought before Hashem by the angels, whereas our sins *chas v’shalom* are brought before Hashem by the Satan. After all of the merits are brought, the Satan is commanded by Hashem to scour the world and gather together all of the sins (of Jews), and bring them before Him. But there is more to the role of the Satan than this on Rosh HaShanah. The Gemara says, “Why do we blow *shofar* when sitting, and then blow them again when standing? In

order to confuse the Satan.”⁶⁷ *Tosafos* explains in the name of *Talmud Yerushalmi* that when the Satan hears the second sound of the *shofar*, it thinks that Hashem is blowing the final *shofar* of the future, where Hashem Himself will slaughter the Angel of Death.⁶⁸ Thus, when the Satan thinks that the redemption has arrived, it is scared that it is about to be slaughtered.

On Rosh HaShanah, the “books of life and the books of death are opened before Him” , and the “books of death” on an inner level refer to the Evil Inclination, who is the root of all death; for the Evil Inclination is also known as the Angel of Death. “He is the Satan, he is the Evil Inclination, he is the Angel of Death.” But when we overcome the “book of death” on Rosh HaShanah and instead we are inscribed in the “book of life”, death is instead inscribed upon the Satan, as Hashem will slaughter the angel of death in the future.

And so, the Satan is judged on Rosh HaShanah. If the coming year continues as the year before it, and there is no Redemption, [this is like “death” to us, and] the Evil Inclination continues to be of influence, *chas v’shalom*, and the Satan is still around. In contrast, when we merit that the coming year will be the year of the Redemption, we merit “life” - and instead it is the Satan who is decreed for death, and Hashem “slaughters the angel of death”.

The Renewal of the Satan\Evil Inclination Each Year

There is an additional way as well to understand the judgment upon the Satan, and it is this concept which mainly affects our own *avodah*. The Satan plays a profound role on Rosh HaShanah in our own *avodah* – let us see how.

Rosh HaShanah is the time where Hashem renews the world. It is the day where Hashem remembers that it is the beginning of the world; at the beginning of the world, the world was completely new, and man was new, with a newly formed *yetzer hora* (Evil Inclination) and *yetzer tov* (good inclination) that was created on the sixth day of Creation. Rosh HaShanah is a day where man can be remembered and renewed again as the “crown of creation” - which he originally was - but along with this, the creation of the Evil Inclination is also renewed every year.

To describe this in different terms, it is as *Chazal* say, that the *yetzer hora* is renewed every day (and according to a different opinion in the Sages, the *yetzer hora* becomes “strengthened” every day), and if not for Hashem’s help, a person cannot overcome it.⁶⁹ Every year, when the world is renewed, the Evil Inclination is also renewed - an entirely new Evil Inclination that is stronger than the year before it, which seeks new ways to bring man down from his exalted level.

On Rosh HaShanah, the Satan stands apart from the rest of the angels and accuses *Klal Yisrael* of their sins. This is essentially the new “Evil Inclination” that is revealed every Rosh HaShanah, which

⁶⁷ *Rosh HaShanah 16a-16b*

⁶⁸ refer to *Sukkah 52a*, and to *Hagaddah shel Pesach*, “And then the Holy Blessed One came, and slaughtered the Angel of Death”

⁶⁹ *Sukkah 52a*

wasn't here the year before it. And in fact, with the more renewal that man undergoes each year, the more "renewed" the Evil Inclination becomes with it, in order to counter man's newly elevated level.

That is the depth of the battle we face with the *yetzer hora*, the Evil Inclination.

We all want a good year. Some people are mainly focused on *gashmiyus* (materialistic) concerns, and those who are more refined ask for matters of *ruchniyus* (spiritual). But in either case, we must understand that no matter how much we receive from Hashem, whether it is material blessing or spiritual blessing, the Evil Inclination is renewed just as much. Evil grows stronger whenever holiness is strengthened, and this is the depth behind the Gemara that "One who is greater than his friend, has a greater Evil Inclination".

Thus, the Satan who is "judged" on Rosh HaShanah – a.k.a. the Evil Inclination - is "judged" based upon how much a person will receive from Hashem this year. If a person will receive much abundance this year, whether in material sustenance or spiritual sustenance, the Satan becomes equally as powerful, and vice versa: the less that a person will receive this year, the less the Satan will become renewed.

The Renewal of the Evil Inclination In Our Times

If we understand this, we should know that this contains a deep point that affects our entire *avodah*.

Any sensible person is aware that in recent times, there is much abundance today. There is an endless amount of material abundance being poured down onto the world today, much more than in previous times. We can also see that there is much more Torah available today, which eclipses the amount of Torah in the world of the previous generations. But even more so, it is the amount of "renewal" today that is unprecedented. There are constantly new things coming out, both in the material world, as well in the spiritual world, of *chiddushei Torah*.

With regards to the spiritual abundance today of *chiddushei Torah*, there are more people than ever who are producing countless *chiddushei Torah*. Understandably, some of these *chiddushei Torah* are closer to the truth, and some are not as truthful, but the amount of renewal that there is today is the greatest, since the era of the giving of the Torah! Of course, there were always great sages throughout the generations who were able to produce *chiddushei Torah*, and their wisdom was much greater than the wise people of today, but there was never an abundance of *chiddushei Torah* for so many people as in today's times.

If there is so much renewal today, both in the material world as well as in the spiritual world of *chiddushei Torah*, we can understand that the Evil Inclination is also renewed with this, in order to counter all of this renewal. Any sensible person can recognize that the *yetzer hora* that was around 10 years ago isn't the same *yetzer hora* now in the year 5776. The amount of *chiddushei Torah* is unprecedented, and we don't know how far it extends, but neither can we know how far the *yetzer hora* goes today, which thinks of creative new ways to entice people to sin.

Every year, the power of renewal increases, both in the side of holiness as well as in the side of evil, in order for the counterbalance to be equal [thereby allowing free will]. Every year the *yetzer hora* is different, and therefore whatever worked last year to fight the *yetzer hora* won't work for this year's *yetzer hora*. The *yetzer hora* was always a sinister force to reckon with, even in previous generations, and it would always attack differently each time. But in the recent generations, this reality has become a lot more intensified.

Now that there is so much renewal in the world, the *yetzer hora* is much more devious than it ever was, and it attacks in so many new different ways. It cannot be traced to any one method of operation. Rather, the *yetzer hora* today attacks us today from all sides, all directions, in a way that our Sages never fathomed! If there was only one certain way that the *yetzer hora* fights us, we could know from which angle it is fighting from, and accordingly, we would know how to fight it. But since the *yetzer hora* today is attacking us from every possible corner, there is war with the Evil Inclination today on all fronts and from every possible direction, wherever we are, much more so than ever.

How Do We Fight The New Evil Inclination of Today's Times?

How, then, are we ever to succeed in fighting the war with the Evil Inclination this year, if it is totally different each year?

Again, if we were clear about how exactly it sneaks up on us, if we were clear in how it will attack us in the coming year of 5777, then perhaps we could figure out how to fight it this year, for we would know how it will attack us and we could be prepared for it. But the problem is that we do not know its main method of attack. It is constantly being renewed each year, so we are not able to anticipate in what way it will appear to fight us this year. So how do we prepare to go to war with the *yetzer hora*?!

Our Avodah Today: Accessing The Spiritual Abundance Available In Our Times

In our generation which we are in, the power of evil is so great today that we cannot be passive about it. It leaves a person with no choice but to enter into an *avodah* which is necessary for a person's spiritual survival today.

Hashem expects us to lead a totally different kind of life now. The great amount of renewal that pours down onto the world today is an abundance of spiritual light which has come to the world, and if one absorbs this light in his soul through a purified mind and a pure heart, and through a search for the truth – he has a much greater chance for change. The great abundance of renewal available in the world today gives a person the opportunity to improve himself, much more than the previous situations could do.

The ways of the Creator can be absorbed by one who searches for it and who reflects about it. A person can see, upon some reflection, that Hashem is bringing great changes to the world, with each passing year. It is like what the Chofetz Chaim said, that what used to take 100 years now takes 1 year. Hashem is bringing about changes in our times, and since man is a resemblance of the Creator, man can also receive great changes in the times we live in, and thereby change and improve on a far larger scale than in the previous generations.

But if one isn't trying to change and instead he is complacent with just a little bit of growth and a little improvement, he is vulnerable to the evils of our times which are constantly changing and swaying people, and he will be swimming against a powerful current, and he will be swept away with it.

The Final "Sorting Process" of the Souls

We are living in the time of the final "sorting process of the souls" (the "*birur hanefashos*"), which will prove the situation of each of our souls, which will show how loyal each of us really is to Hashem. It is the time of history where Hashem is asking each person to decide where his loyalties lie. Each person now is being asked this question: "Do you want to connect yourself with Hashem, truthfully - and not just to say this as a superficial expression on your lips?"

It won't be enough today if we are just "loyal" in the way we dress, in spite of the fact that it is very important not to change our manner of dress, as the Jewish people steadfastly kept to in Egypt, when they didn't change their style of dress. Today, the question for each Jew is: Whose side are you really on? Whom do you associate yourself with? Do you want an internal kind of life, a life of seeking Hashem Himself, and His Torah, and the fulfillment of His mitzvos, and doing His will completely?

What is being asked of each Jew today is not just to make small changes - which is certainly important and needed - but mainly, to change in the depths of our heart, internally; where the truth is. As Moshe said to the Jewish people: "*Who will be for Hashem, and come towards me?*" And as Eliyahu challenged the people to stand on his side if they believe in G-d, or in the false prophets who were worshipping idols; where everyone was forced to decide which side they were truly on.

In the times we live in today, this "sorting process of the souls" is now underway for every single Jewish soul. Each soul now must decide where the depths of his heart lie. If one considers himself to be loyal to Hashem today, that means he must direct his life accordingly, and be willing to go against the direction that the entire world is taking today.

That is the depth of the change which Hashem is asking of each person today. Hashem isn't asking each person today to jump into the sea, like Nachshon ben Aminadav did. Only a few individuals can be on that level [of absolute self-sacrifice]. What is being asked of each person today is to change the general direction of his life, and not to follow the rest of the world. If a person today wants to follow the direction of the rest of the world, he will fall together with them, with the newer and more advanced that it becomes, with the newer Evil Inclinations that appear everywhere.

But if one directs his life in the opposite direction that the world is taking today, and he decides in the depths of his soul that his heart belongs to Hashem, to His Torah, and to doing His will, and he is willing to go against the rest of the world – then he is fulfilling exactly what Hashem is asking of a person to do. When you go in the opposite direction of the world’s lifestyle today, that is what will protect you.

As long as a person tries to stay within the lifestyle of the world today and he attempts to fight the Evil Inclination from there, he will be engulfed by the powerful amount of evil that surrounds him, because the evil today is a much bigger threat than it was to us in previous generations. In contrast, if one makes sure that the way he lives is not like the way of the rest of the world, and he truly searches for Hashem, the Torah, the mitzvos, and doing His will – if this is all he is concerned about in his life, he will be saved from all the evil today, and he will merit to be written for a “good” year.

But if one hasn’t yet decided deep down where his loyalties lie, and he isn’t ready to live differently than the way the rest of the world lives – he will be subject to the pressures of the Evil Inclination, who gets stronger every day, whose sole desire is to seek a person’s destruction. Even after a person does decide to change his direction in life, he will still need Hashem to help him, for *Chazal* say that we cannot overcome the Evil Inclination without Hashem’s help. But even though it is naturally impossible for us to overcome the Evil Inclination and we need the supernatural help from Hashem in order to overcome it, that is exactly what Hashem expects from us to do.

Seeking Truth

Upon understanding these words, we should reflect about the following.

We should know that when we go through Rosh HaShanah this year, it is not simply that we are going through another Rosh HaShanah, and another Rosh HaShanah, and then another Rosh HaShanah, as we go through each year. In the times we live in, there is no Rosh HaShanah that is like the Rosh HaShanah of the year before it. It is an entirely new Rosh HaShanah each year, because each year is so fundamentally different than the year before it; they are light years apart.

The “descent of the generations” increases with each passing year, making each year on a much lower spiritual level than the year before it, to the point that we do not know at all if the new year will come upon us for the good.

The change which Hashem wants to see from each of us is a fundamental change, to change our life totally, in the whole entire way that we are living our life, on an inward level. We need to clarify to ourselves what our life is about, what we truly want in life; to see if we truly want to become close to Hashem, to see if we truly want a life of Torah – and the emphasis is on if we “truly” want it, as opposed to trying to ‘get the best out of both worlds’ , using various “*heterim*” (halachic leniencies) of all kinds. Instead, we need to really seek truth, to live spiritually, to seek a life of closeness to Hashem.

In Conclusion

May Hashem merit us, together with all of *Klal Yisrael*, the time when Hashem will come and slaughter the Angel of Death. But if, *chas v'shalom*, the world continues to exist with the Evil Inclination, where we must choose between following our good inclination versus our Evil Inclination, then the true power of choice lays before us - and when such is the case, may we merit to choose the truth. We should then understand that the Rosh HaShanah of the year 5777 will force each of us to make a deep, internal choice. That is where the depth of our life shall lie.

The various resolutions that we take upon ourselves for the coming year may be small changes, but the root of the changes in our soul must be awesome and profound. May we merit to make that proper root of change, and as all of our souls gather in front of Hashem and beseech Him, may we all merit to be written in the book of the completely righteous, for a good year, in which we will seek closeness with Hashem, as it is written, "*And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good.*"

1.19 | *Malchiyos In Action*⁷⁰

Malchiyos, Zichronos and Shofaros: How Rosh HaShanah Is Unique To The Jewish People

We say in the prayers on Rosh HaShanah, “This is the day of the beginning of Your actions, a remembrance of the first day.” Rosh HaShanah is called the first day of the Creation.

There is a dispute in the Sages if the world was created on the 1st of the month of Nissan or on the 1st of Tishrei. Elsewhere the Sages state that the world was created on the 25th of Elul. Rabbeinu Nissim Gaon asked: Why is Rosh HaShanah called the first day of Creation, if the Gemara says that it was created on the 25th of Elul? He answers that since man is the purpose of Creation, and man was created on the 1st of Tishrei, that is why the 1st of Tishrei is considered to be the beginning of the world. Hence, Rosh HaShanah is on the 1st day of Tishrei, and not on the 25th of Elul. It is the day of “The beginning of all Your actions”, and man is the primary action of Hashem’s Creation, who was created on the 1st of Tishrei. That is why Rosh HaShanah is on the 1st of Tishrei.

On Rosh HaShanah, Hashem judges all of Creation, even the angels. Everyone is judged on Rosh HaShanah, both Jews and gentiles. How, then, is Rosh HaShanah unique for the Jewish people, if even the gentiles are judged on this day? It is because on Rosh HaShanah, only the Jewish people recite the verses of *malchiyos*, *zichronos* and *shofaros*.

Malchiyos is uniquely the Jewish people’s declaration, for only the Jewish people declare Hashem as their *Melech* King. The gentiles do not declare Hashem as King, and they don’t even know when Rosh HaShanah arrives. Thus, the aspect of *malchiyos* makes Rosh HaShanah more unique for the Jewish people alone.

The verses of *zichronos*, which remembers the act of the *akeidah*, are also a unique merit for the Jewish people. Yitzchok’s act of offering himself as a sacrifice is an eternal merit for his descendants, and this is only for the Jewish people, not the gentiles. What about Esav, though, who was a son of Yitzchok? Although Esav was Yitzchok’s offspring, he did not receive the merit of the *akeidah*, because the Sages refer to Esav as a “*Yisrael mumar*”, an apostate Jew, who didn’t continue the ways of his father.

Shofaros are also unique for the Jewish people, because the gentiles do not blow *shofar* on Rosh HaShanah. Even if a gentile were to blow *shofar* on Rosh HaShanah, he wouldn’t get any reward for it, because there is no *mitzvah* of *shofar* for him, and if a Jew would hear him blow *shofar*, he doesn’t fulfill the *mitzvah*.

Thus, Rosh HaShanah for the Jewish people is unique in that only the Jewish people declare *malchiyos*, *zichronos* and *shofaros*. This sets them apart from the rest of the world.

70 שש השנה_071_הכנה

Putting Malchiyos Into Action: Taking On Small One Act of Improvement

Through *malchiyos*, we declare Hashem as King. But, practically speaking, when a person hears *shofar* in shul on Rosh HaShanah, does he accept Hashem as King over himself? Often a person doesn't understand what he is saying when he says these verses of *malchiyos*. Even if he does understand, he usually doesn't have *kavanah* in what he is saying. If he is not having intention in what he is saying, he cannot accept Hashem as King over him.

Let us ask a simple question. If not for the *nusach* (prescribed text) of *davening*, would a person accept Hashem as the *Melech*? If we wouldn't have a *nusach* for the *davening*, what would a person do, in order to declare Hashem as the *Melech*? How would the Avos declare Hashem as *Melech*, when there wasn't yet a *nusach* of *davening*? What would a person do without a *siddur* – would he declare Hashem as *melech*? People have been trained since they are children to recite the *nusach* of *davening*, but they often don't understand what they are saying. They come to *shul* on Rosh HaShanah, recite the *davening* in their *siddur*, they hear the *shofar* and they fulfill the *mitzvah* - and they think that this is called "Rosh HaShanah"!

Malchiyos is not merely some verses to recite. It must be a true resolution that a person makes, where he accepts Hashem as the *Melech* over him!

This step must be traversed before Rosh HaShanah, not on Rosh HaShanah itself. The *avodah* of Rosh HaShanah must begin, practically speaking, before it comes Rosh HaShanah. One must really make Hashem into the *Melech*!

1 – Taking Upon One Action of Change

There are many levels within *malchiyos*. But how can we do it, on a practical level?

A *melech*, a king, is an authority that we listen to. He is someone who gives an order or command, and his servants follow through with it, no matter what. Hashem is called *Avinu Malkeinu*, He is our Father as well as our King. On Rosh HaShanah, we relate to Him as a King, making Him King over us, through reciting the verses of *malchiyos*. In order to accept Hashem's Kingship over us, it is not realistic if we resolve to perfectly carry out all of His ways. No one can be on this level. Instead, each person at his own level needs to take upon himself on resolution, in which he will subjugate himself to Hashem, in at least one area that will be realistic for him to keep to. It must be something small, but which shows that you have progressed since last year.

Any person on his own level should do this, to accept Hashem's command and will upon himself, in at least one area that he can keep to. He should try to do it for a year, or few a months, or a few weeks, or at least for the ten days of repentance.

2 – Applying The Heart

That is all the first part, and it concerns action, which is the external level. There is also a second part, which is the internal level: to apply the heart. A person's heart has become closed throughout the course of the year, and when it comes Rosh HaShanah, it is time to reopen it. So when one accepts himself to make one small change in his life, in order to show that he is accepting Hashem's kingship over him (as explained above), he also needs to do so from the depths of his heart.

Often a person is used to doing the *mitzvos* since childhood, but his heart has remained on the level of a child. For that reason, in order for a person to better himself, it is not enough for a person to merely do the *mitzvos* – he also needs to put his heart into it.

Putting Our Heart Into Torah Learning

Baruch Hashem, we merit here to sit and learn Torah all day. You are praiseworthy, and praiseworthy is your lot. Many people don't merit this. Certainly, you can take upon yourself to learn with a little more exertion than before, but you also need to put in some more heart into your learning, by adding some enthusiasm and joy, into your learning. This is an inner *avodah*.

Practically speaking, we all stood at Har Sinai and accepted the Torah. When we learn Torah, is this the same as learning other wisdoms? Is learning Gemara the same thing as math? Is the entire difference because learning Gemara is a *mitzvah* and math isn't? Is it because Gemara is holy and math isn't? The *Ramchal* in *sefer Derech Etz Chaim* says the difference. It is because when a person learns other wisdoms, he is learning something new which he has never yet encountered before, but when a person learns Torah, it is like blowing on a coal with tiny embers – a person already has the entire Torah in a potential state, because he learned it from an angel in his mother's womb, and when he learns Torah, he is revealing the Torah that he has already acquired in the womb.

The Torah has been found within every Jewish soul ever since we accepted the Torah at Har Sinai. It is found deep, deep inside our *neshamah*, in a hidden place. When a baby exits the womb upon birth, an angel strikes him on the lips and he forgets all the Torah that he learned in the womb, but this is only an external forgetting of the Torah. The Torah learning still remains, on a very internal level, deep in one's *neshamah*. Thus the Torah is not a new wisdom which we need to acquire. Rather, when we learn Torah, we must understand, that the Torah is coming out from inside of us! The entire Torah exists within every person, on a potential level, and we need to bring it out from potential.

When one opens his heart to Torah, he can reveal the Torah from within him. This is the difference between a true Torah scholar and one who isn't. A true Torah scholar is not someone who learned and remembers a lot of Torah. A true Torah scholar, besides for learning and remembering a lot, is one who learns Torah because he recognizes it is a different wisdom and that it is part of his *neshamah*. Exertion in Torah is entirely meant to bring the Torah out of one's potential state. This is the secret behind all exertion in Torah.

When one is aware of this, he understands that deep within him there is an awesome treasure. The Torah is not found outside of you, it is found deep within your *neshamah!*

How do reach this deep place in our *neshamah*? It is through learning and putting in effort, and thinking, and reviewing, our Torah learning, and then receiving *siyata d'shmaya*, but in addition to the above, and more importantly, it is through opening the heart to Torah: to yearn for the Torah.

The Jewish people received the Torah not only long ago, but as a power of the soul, and when Rosh HaShanah comes, we should understand that all spiritual growth is based on the power of learning Torah. All the levels of spiritual growth start with Torah. That is what Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair said, that Torah leads to watchfulness, which leads to alacrity, which leads to cleanliness, etc. The entire ladder of spiritual growth is footed in the Torah, because all is built on Torah.

One should understand that if he really wants a good year, he must reach the root of man's task on this world, by increasing some exertion in Torah, even if it is a little bit – and along with this, he should also put more of his heart into learning Torah.

When we merit this, with *siyata d'shmaya*, to put our hearts more into learning Torah along with increasing some exertion in our Torah learning, the light of the neshamah can be revealed within us. This changes one's life entirely – that is, if one truly absorbs this point, as opposed to just hearing these words with his ears.

In Conclusion

May the Creator merit us to recognize the worth of our souls and what is contained in it, and the more one learns Torah, the more elevated these days become, and may we merit to connect our souls to the Creator, to accept His Kingship from our own will, to yearn for the words of Torah and to increase our exertion in learning Torah, and from the light of the holy Torah which comes from Hashem, may we all merit a good year, and a *kesiva v'chasima tovah*, for everyone.



TEN DAYS OF REPENTENCE

2.1 | *How To Do Teshuvah*⁷¹

Two Ways of Doing Teshuvah

Rabbeinu Yonah⁷² writes: “Know that anyone who sins in a happenstance manner, due to a strengthening of one’s passions and a loss of self-control, firstly, he has to regret what he did, and reflect with his heart on his sin...but if someone is always on an improper path, and his sins overtake him each day and he is always repeating his behavior, the first thing such a person must do is to leave his evil ways and thoughts.”

In these words, Rabbeinu Yonah is telling us how to act in the superficial sense: don’t sin. But there is also an inner point contained in his words – let us explain.

There are some people whose deeds are connected with Hashem, and there are just some points in their life that are missing connection to Hashem. Their self-improvement is to work on those areas in their life that are missing connection to Hashem.

But there are some people, who even though they keep Torah and do all the *mitzvos*, they are still missing the inner meaning behind Torah and *mitzvos*. They don’t act upon love for Hashem and aren’t joyful as they should be; there is no feeling of any relationship to Hashem in their life; they do not feel that Hashem is our Father in Heaven, and that we can have a father-son relationship with Him. Such people are not living their lives properly at all. They are disconnected from the true meaning of life, from the purpose we are created for.

For such a person to improve, taking another *chrumra* (stringency) is not enough to be considered *Teshuvah*. He has to change his entire attitude toward life. He must leave the superficial kind of life he is living and connect with the One who created this world. If someone doesn’t feel a love for Hashem burning within him – if he doesn’t feel yearnings for his Father – this is a definite sign that the way he is living his life is totally wrong.

The Root of the Problem: Mistaken Notions

This is a point which many people forget and are thus mistaken about.

When a ben Torah (one who keeps the Torah) decides to do *Teshuvah*, and especially in Elul and *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, he thinks into the way he is living his life and examines his deeds. He usually finds that he needs improvement in *shemiras halashon* (guarding his tongue from evil speech), *bittul*

⁷¹ This translation is adapted from *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Yomim Noraim*, page 249. It is based on *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Volume V*, p.40, which was written by the author himself.

<http://www.bilvavi.net/english/ellul-how-do-teshuvah>

⁷² *Shaarei Teshuvah* 1: 11

Torah (wasting Torah study time), he has to concentrate better in his *davening* and when he makes a beracha, etc.

What does he do? He takes on various resolutions in all of these things, so he can improve all these areas. We can see that most of the time, these resolutions don't last for long. Even if they do last for a while, they do not produce a truly growing person. Where is the root of the problem?

It's exactly what we started out saying. People are doing the first kind of *Teshuvah* that Rabbeinu Yonah mentioned, which is to avoid sins that come happenstance. But really, people often need the second kind of *Teshuvah* – they need to get back onto the proper, good path.

If not for Hashem, it would be impossible

Let us elaborate.

The two kinds of *Teshuvah* which Rabbeinu Yonah mentions are totally different. One who sins only happenstance doesn't need to change his whole life; it is enough for him to accept upon himself that he will avoid those sins which he stumbles in. But if someone in general isn't living in the right way, he has to change his whole way of life, and after he gets back onto the right path in life, he can then fix up his sins.

If we reflect on our situation, our shortcomings which we find in ourselves do not have to do with the sin itself. It is really because we don't feel the inner meaning behind what a sin is. This is all because we aren't on the right path in general.

There is another reason why our resolutions often don't last. *Chazal* say that the evil inclination gets stronger each day, and if not for Hashem's help, a person cannot overpower it.⁷³ When does Hashem help a person? He only helps a person when the person is found with Him and lives with Him, connected to Him. Only then does Hashem help him.

We must understand that a person does not have the strength to keep his resolutions. It is way above what a human being can do. Only when a person is connected to Hashem in every time and situation can he be helped – at all times, and in every situation. The further away a person is from Hashem, the less help he gets from Hashem. When a person isn't connected to the inner meaning of life – Hashem – he will have no chance in keeping his resolutions.

There will definitely be people who will read these words and not understand it. They will react, "Are we far from Hashem?! We learn ten hours a day and do all the *mitzvos* properly. Aren't we attached to Hashem already from Torah and *mitzvos*? What else connects a person to Hashem other than Torah and *mitzvos*!?"

But if someone has this question, it shows how far he is from what it means to love Hashem, from the inner meaning of life...from Hashem. They do not understand that there is a more inner

⁷³ *Sukkah* 52a

world than the kind of world they are living in. They think that a Jew is only “Torah and *mitzvos*”, and they aren’t aware that their *chiyus* (vitality) in life is superficial. Such a question shows that they aren’t really getting any life from the Torah and the *mitzvos*!

Connection with Hashem At All Times

What does it mean to get an inner kind of vitality? What does it mean to have connection with Hashem? There are two layers to this.

The first layer of this is that a person has to recognize that he is living in Hashem’s world, and that everything as we know it belongs to Hashem. For example, look at a pen. Think how it belongs to Hashem. He created it. Look at your hand too and realize that Hashem created it. Your soul, which is the life-force in you that makes your body work, was also made by Hashem, and it too belongs to Hashem.

This is just food for thought, but when you think about it, you can see that the entire universe is calling out the Creator. A person should reflect into this a lot, until he naturally develops an outlook at everything from this recognition – that he is only a creation of Hashem. This attitude has to envelope a person in every part of his life, 24/7.

The second layer of this, which is higher than the first, is to realize the inner point of life – that Hashem is our Father, and we are His children. A person has to look at everything in life with this father-son relationship – a relationship that involves love and a desire for closeness. Just like a son wants to speak with his father and be with him, so should a person feel the same way towards Hashem. (Unfortunately, some people don’t even feel closeness with their own fathers, and Hashem should have mercy on them, because they will not be helped by the words here). In whatever action a person does, he has to feel how “my Father” is asking me to do this.

In short, all of life is really the *mitzvah* of “honoring your Father” – our Father in Heaven. We need to view every situation of life like this. To live life on such a level is the whole depth of *Teshuvah*. (How we actually acquire this outlook on life is something else, which we will explain later.)

Teshuvah: Returning to Hashem

Teshuvah means “to return.” To where are we returning? To Hashem!

The main point of *Teshuvah* is not to leave sin, but rather because sin distances a person from closeness to Hashem, a person has to do *Teshuvah* so he can remove the barriers between him and Hashem, which got created from the sin. But even if a person manages to leave the sin, that still doesn’t mean he has become close to Hashem. He might be avoiding every sin, but he still doesn’t have a deep connection with Hashem.

A person has to create a deep, internal bond with Hashem, like a father-son relationship. That is the essence of *Teshuvah*. If a person just leaves his sins but he doesn't develop this bond, he is missing the whole point of *Teshuvah*.

This is written as well in the words of Rabbeinu Yonah: "His heart should understand that is it evil and bitter to abandon Hashem." That is the main part of *Teshuvah*!

Teshuvah Out of Fear Isn't Enough for This

The *Gemara* states that if one does *Teshuvah* out of *yirah* (fear), his intentional sins do not get transformed into merits, but into unintentional sins; if he did *Teshuvah* out of *ahavah* (love of Hashem), then his intentional sins become transformed into merits.

Here we see that doing *Teshuvah* from fear of Hashem alone isn't enough to break the barrier that separates between one and the Creator; it doesn't erase the sin, and it merely becomes like an unintentional sin. It is only when a person does *Teshuvah* out of love for Hashem that his sin is erased and it becomes a merit for him. Only such *Teshuvah* removes the barriers between him and Hashem.

Sin Ruins Our Connection with Hashem

What does it mean to do *Teshuvah* out of love for Hashem? It means like how a son loves his father.

The true *Teshuvah* is that a person leaves his sins because he wants to be close to his Father. The first thing a person must do is to realize that he is dealing with his Father, and that each sin distances him from his bond with his Father.

Many people struggle with this point. They do not feel how a sin distances one from having a bond with Hashem. They know about it intellectually, but they do not feel it.

The root of the problem is really that such people never even once felt a true connection with Hashem in their life. Thus they do not realize how a sin is so damaging to one's relationship with Hashem; they don't have the bond to begin with.

If a person is still at this level, he has to form a relationship with Hashem – before he begins to do *Teshuvah* on his sins. The way to do this will be explained soon.

When a person comes to the clear recognition that sin ruins ones bond with Hashem, and he reflects into this, he can find different ways how this feeling gets expressed.

Recognizing the Damage

We will open up our words here with a physical parable – how a father and son relate. Through this parable, we will learn about what it means for a Jew to have a relationship with his Father in heaven.

When a son rebels against his father, there are four factors that are included in his act of rebellion. 1) By rebelling, he has lost a loving connection with his father. 2) The son is ashamed in front of his father and can't look in his face, because of what he has done to him. 3) The son feels lowly inside that he has fallen so low and angered his father. 4) The son has pain, because he knows that his father is pained at his behaviors.

The same goes for one's relationship with Hashem. When a Jew commits a sin, there are four parts to what he must now do.

1) He has to feel that he has weakened – and perhaps disconnected totally – his loving relationship with Hashem. This was explained before.

2) He is ashamed to look Hashem in the face. This is a little different than the parable of a father and son, because by a regular father and son, the son is only ashamed when he's in front of his father. But in our relationship with Hashem, a person is constantly in front of Hashem, and Hashem always sees him; thus, a person has to always feel ashamed in front of Hashem. (This is a point which many people struggle with, because they do not constantly see Hashem. The first thing they must work on is to feel that Hashem sees them every second. Only after this can one feel a constant shame in front of Hashem).

This is mentioned explicitly by Rabbeinu Yonah, who writes: "The sixth part of *Teshuvah* is shame, as it is written, *"I am ashamed and humiliated, for I have borne the disgrace of my youth."* A person is very ashamed to sin in front of people, because they will humiliate him for his sins. How can a person then not be ashamed from the Creator? It is only because Hashem is far from his understanding, and that is why his afraid of humans, but not from Hashem."

3) A person has to feel lowly inside: How can I have been so brazen to disgrace Hashem and to rebel against His will?

This is also expressed by Rabbeinu Yonah, who writes, "One must have pain and think how evil it is to rebel against his Creator...that he did not remember his Creator who made him from nothing, and he forgot His kindnesses done to him...and how his heart could have the audacity to anger Him."

4) A person also needs to feel pain that Hashem also feels pain at His son who has distanced himself. This is really *tza'ar hashechinah* – the "pain of the *Shechinah*." It is already explained by *Chazal* and the *sefarim hakedoshim* about how a Jew must feel the pain of the *Shechinah*.

This last point itself has three parts to it: 1) Pain over the fact that his son has distanced himself from Him, and that Hashem misses His child, since He can't be with him due to the child's sins that have separated the bond. 2) Since Hashem created this universe in order to bestow good upon all of

Creation, by sinning, Hashem has to punish him and He can't (so to speak) bestow the good He wanted to bestow. A father has great pain when he can't be good to his child. 3) It is written, *"Everything created in My Name was created in My honor."* The purpose of creation is to reveal the glory of Hashem in the world, as explained in *sefer Daas Tevunos*. Thus, when a person sins and conceals the glory of Hashem from being revealed upon the world, the purpose of creation has been held back, and this causes great pain to the *Shechinah*.

Closeness to Hashem: The Beginning of our Mission

Most people, upon reading the words up until now, will feel that these four levels are very far from us. Most people do not feel any of these four levels in their life, and some people feel a little bit of it in their life.

What is the root of the problem?

Rabbeinu Yonah has already answered it: "How can a person not be ashamed in front of Hashem? It is only because Hashem is far from his understanding." When a person doesn't feel ashamed in front of Hashem, it is really because he is far from Hashem to begin with. His Avodah is to begin a relationship with Hashem.

How can a person do it? Can it be done through Torah and *mitzvos* alone? We can all see that we have been learning Torah for many years and have been doing all the *mitzvos*, yet we are still far from Hashem!

The solution will soon be explained.

The Motivation for Teshuvah – The Soul

It is now upon us to figure out what is the proper way to doing real *Teshuvah* – how to feel that Hashem is our Father and we are His child. First, we need to think: what is what drives us to do *Teshuvah*?

Rabbeinu Yonah writes: "The level of *Teshuvah* depends on the amount of bitterness and pain that one expresses over his sins. This is repentance which comes from a purity of the soul and clean mind. Such pain comes from the purity of the Heavenly soul."

Here it is explained that the true *Teshuvah* one can do is only when one is being motivated by his soul. To feel closeness to Hashem is only through one's soul, and only the soul can recognize its Creator and feel love toward Him, like how a son feels love to his father. It is thus upon us to understand how one can reach a level in which his soul is awakening him to *Teshuvah*.

Three Ways to Reach the Soul

A person is made up of a body and a soul, and the body conceals the soul. If a person wants to reveal his soul, he needs to remove the barriers of the body that conceal it. How can a person do this? There are several ways.

Rabbeinu Yonah writes: “A person can reach shame when he sits in solitude and reflects on the greatness of Hashem, and how evil it is to rebel against Him, and by remembering always that Hashem sees his actions and inspects his innards, and views his thoughts.”

In his words are contained three ways how we can get through to our soul: by sitting in solitude, by thinking about the greatness of Hashem, and by remembering always that Hashem sees what we do.

Let us explain each way.

The First Way -- Solitude

The soul is like a *kol demamah dakah*, a “soft, subtle voice.” The body, by contrast, is like a “great, noisy voice.” The body and its desires are very strong and are felt easily, while the soul’s desires are deep and subtle, not easily felt.

Therefore, if a person’s body is always at the fore of things, a person can’t reach his soul, which is a “soft, subtle voice.” A person needs to bring himself into a state in which he hears an inner voice.

The first step in doing this is *hisbodedus* (solitude). Many great leaders of previous generations practiced it, and the Chofetz Chaim practiced it for two hours a day. (We are not advising here that everyone do *hisbodedus* for two hours a day). When a person has *hisbodedus*, he has an inner silence, and through that it is easier to get through to his soul and leave his noisy bodily state. He can leave the noise of the body and enter into the soft, subtle voice of the soul.

Hisbodedus cannot be done in a pressurized way. A person has to be calm and relaxed for it; if not, the body still has a hold on the person, and a person will not be able to reach his inner world. It is recommended for this to do it outside your house, faraway from people. A quiet surrounding can give a person an inner calm.

The Second Way – Reflecting on the Greatness of Hashem

What should a person do during this time of solitude?

Rabbeinu Yonah writes: “To think about the greatness of Hashem.” This is a general term; let us explain it more in detail.

A person has to think and remember that his limited, while Hashem is unlimited. First, a person should look around at the world and see, “*How great are Your actions, Hashem.*” After this, a person should see himself as only a small part of the world, and how the world is thousands of times greater than his eyes can see. Then, a person can reflect that there are even more planets and stars which he cannot see, and he begins to realize how small of a speck he is in comparison to Hashem. Eventually, a person will feel how big Hashem is, in comparison to how small he is.

Then a person can reflect that he is only small in terms of his physical body, but he has a G-dly soul, which is a “potion of Hashem.” Since the soul is a piece of Hashem, it cannot be small. Now a person can feel a need to connect to his own soul and come out of his tininess, and to connect to Hashem, who is endless. Slowly more and more, a person can awaken a desire to reveal his soul.

The Third Way – Hashem Sees Everything

The last point which Rabbeinu Yonah writes is that a person should reflect that Hashem sees all that he does. Let us elaborate on this point as well.

A person should think that Hashem is actually found right next to him, for “His glory fills the entire world.” Just like there is a floor underneath you and a table to sit by, so is Hashem next to you as real as can be, and His presence is even more real than anything else you see. Think about this for many hours, until you begin to actually feel it.

When a person hasn’t yet reaches his soul, he won’t come to do proper *Teshuvah*. Only when a person feels his soul can he feel closeness with Hashem, and when one feels that closeness, he is bothered by a sin and feels how it distances him from Hashem. He will be awakened to feel shame and the pain of the *Shechinah*, which are natural feelings of the soul.

To feel closeness with Hashem is not just about leaving our sins. It is a concept which must envelope every aspect in our life. Whatever we do, we should feel that we are doing it because this is the will of our Father, and when we merit this awareness, all our life is spent on the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av* – honoring our Father.

2.2 | *Inner Teshuvah* ⁷⁴

Teshuvah - Returning

We are in the Ten Days of Repentance, which ends on the holy day of Yom Kippur, the “day that atones for those who return”⁷⁵.

The *Rishonim* explain that “*teshuvah*” (repentance) means to “return” to the situation of before the sin. This applies both on a personal level, as well as on the collective level of mankind, for all of mankind must ultimately repent over the source of all sin, the sin of Adam HaRishon.

But to explain this more, the Gemara⁷⁶ says that a *baal teshuvah* is one who is tempted three times in the exact same situation to commit the old sin, and he overcomes the test each time. So *teshuvah* is when the situation returns to you again, and you choose not to sin. That is how one “returns” to the situation of before the sin.

Rabbeinu Yonah, in *Shaarei Teshuvah*, adds on to this that even if the person is never actually tested with the temptation again, but he has elevated himself to a level in which it is clear to Hashem that this person would not sin again in this situation, it is considered that he has overcome the sin and that he has genuinely done *teshuvah* over the sin.

In any case, *teshuvah* is defined as returning to how it was before the situation of the sin. On a more subtle note, it is a return to the exact same temptation and to overcome the temptation, which returns him to the level of before the sin.

From a simple understanding, *teshuvah* is when a person committed a certain act of sin and he repents over this action that he committed. He returns himself to what it was like before the sinful action. But there is more depth to it, for man consists of both external and internal layers, which go beyond action; Rabbeinu Yonah says that part of *teshuvah* is to fix the desire to sin - he must not only rectify the deed he committed, but the root of the sin, which was the very desire to sin.

Thus, *teshuvah* is not just about correcting the “action” that was committed by the physical body. It is about returning the soul’s abilities to their proper place, which had been misused for the purpose of sinning, and thus they need to be returned to their pure source.

If one only does *teshuvah* on a “body” level, his *teshuvah* begins and ends with deeds; he committed a sinful ‘act’ and later he repents over the sinful ‘act’. He stops sinning when he is tested again, by refraining from the committing the deed again. But one who cares for his soul will be more

⁷⁴ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/yom-kippur-025-inner-teshuvah>

⁷⁵ On another note, the Rav explained that there is also an aspect of Yom Kippur which atones even for those who do not return. Refer to the *shiur* of בהנפיש_007 יום כיפור

⁷⁶ Yoma 86a

concerned that just rectifying the actions. Besides for doing *teshuvah* in the physical sense, by refraining from actions of sin, he will do more *teshuvah* than that. He does *teshuvah* in his very soul.

Inner Teshuvah

What is *teshuvah* on a “soul” level?

There are many facets to this. The Maharal⁷⁷ wrote a section entitled *Nesiv HaTeshuvah*, which consists of eight chapters, and in the beginning chapters, the Maharal writes of four steps of what it means to do “inner *teshuvah*”.

Anyone who cares for his soul needs to first conceptualize these matters at least intellectually, and then he must attempt to recognize these matters on a personal level and do *teshuvah* accordingly.

Teshuvah on a physical body level, as we explained, is to refrain from committing the sinful action. This includes recognizing that the action is a sin, to regret it and to confess it verbally, and to resolve not to commit the sin again. These are the four parts of repentance which we are all familiar with⁷⁸, because they are all within the realm of action, and we live in a “world of action”, so we can identify better with these aspects. It is clear to us what sin is and it is clear to us what *teshuvah* is; of course, there is difficulty in doing *teshuvah*, but at least we recognize what *teshuvah* is, when it comes to the realm of “action”.

One who cares for his soul not only does *teshuvah* on a physical level by refraining from sinful actions. He does *teshuvah* on an inner level. Inner *teshuvah* requires firstly a conceptual understanding of what defines *teshuvah*, and after that, for one to recognize these matters personally in his own soul, and to do *teshuvah* from that inner level of recognition.

1- Returning To Higher Intellect

The first facet of inner *teshuvah*, the Maharal writes, is to return to the higher intellect that is far removed from any materialistic aspects of man (“*seichel nivdal*”, or “*seichel elyon*”).

Sin comes from a pull towards materialism, which lowers man from the higher intellect that is apart from materialism. This intellect, the Maharal says, is essentially referring to the holy Torah.

It is clear that the fact that the Torah was given on Yom Kippur [the second set of Luchos] is not a coincidence; there is a connection between Torah and Yom Kippur. It is because Torah is the root of *teshuvah*. The inner work of our soul is to return the materialistic drives of the body that caused one to sin, to the higher intellect that is the Torah.

⁷⁷ *Nesivas Olam: Nesiv HaTeshuvah*

⁷⁸ *The four basic steps in teshuvah are: (1) azivas hacheit, abandoning the sin; (2) charatah, regret; (3) viduy, confession; (4) kabbalah al ha'asid – resolving not to commit this sin again.*

We can all identify with refraining from committing the action of sin again, but to return afterwards to the higher intellect is a concept that we are not always familiar with. We are not referring to regular human intellect, but to a higher intellect contained in the soul. It is for one to truthfully return, in his very soul, to the Torah. This is the *avodah* of doing *teshuvah* in our soul.

If one is not clear that the body and the soul are separate entities, he will be like a mixture that is not sorted out, and it will then not be possible for him to do *teshuvah* on the inner level. But if a person is aware of his inner workings, knowing the difference between his materialistic drives of the body \ *nefesh habehaimis* (animalistic layer of the soul) with the higher aspects of his inner self – the higher intellect, contained in the *neshamah* (Divine soul) – he will be able to do *teshuvah* on Yom Kippur on an entirely deeper level. Besides for the five forms of suffering of the body on Yom Kippur, he will be returning to the Torah on Yom Kippur.

This is the hidden “giving of the Torah” that is contained in Yom Kippur. It is a concept that most people do not know about, not even intellectually. There is almost no one who thinks about the giving of the Torah that is on Yom Kippur. As we have explained here according to the Maharal, it is part of the fundamental understanding of deeper *teshuvah*.

2- Returning To The State of “Yashrus”

A second aspect of inner *teshuvah*, the Maharal explains, is to return to the state of “*yoshor*” (uprightness) which existed before the first sin.

It is written, “G-d made man upright (*yoshor*), but they sought many calculations (*cheshbonos rabim*)”. By sinning, man deviated from the truth, and ever since then, man has fallen into the state of “*cheshbonos rabim*”. By sinning, man deviated from the truth, from *yashrus* (straight-mindedness), and he fell into *cheshbonos rabim* which are crooked and deviating from truth.

Thus, *teshuvah* on a deeper level means to return from our crooked state of post-sin and to return the original state - *yoshor*, or *yashrus*, or *seichel hayoshor*.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner writes that *yashrus* of *seichel* defines the praise of our earlier *Rishonim*, who possessed *sevara yeshara* (straight, pure logic) and *yashrus halev* (uprightness of heart). Of *yashrus halev*, it is written, “*U’liyishrei lev simcha*” – “And to the upright of heart, there is joy.” When one reaches *yashrus lev* on Yom Kippur through his *teshuvah*, he can arrive at the true *simcha* (joy) that is on Succos, the time of our joy.

Thus, there is an *avodah* for one to realize how he tends to diverge from truth; both the intellect and the heart can deviate from truth, and one must see how both his intellect and heart have a tendency to deviate. Then one must attempt to return himself to the original state of *yashrus* that is deep within.

One must first understand this at least on a conceptual level, and after understanding it intellectually, one must then work on this matter personally, returning his own soul from the state of

crookedness, back to the man's original state of *yashrus*. "G-d made man upright" – this is where we must return to when we do *teshuvah*.

3- Returning To "Peshitus"

The third aspect of inner *teshuvah*, the Maharal writes, is to return to *peshitus*, "simplicity". Sin, by contrast, comes from *harkavah* (combining factors together), and when one combines various thoughts together, sometimes he acts correctly because of this, and sometimes he comes to act incorrectly. But the pure state of the soul is *peshitus* (simplicity), where it is not possible to think of sinning.

Thus, one who cares for his soul needs to return to this simple point ("*makom hapashut*") in the soul. The depth of repenting over a sin – returning from it – is to return to *peshitus*. If one does not recognize a place of *peshitus* in his own soul, he is like a "captured child" who doesn't know any better, who lives in ignorance of this place in the soul; he has nowhere to return to from sin. But when one recognizes in his soul the areas of *harkavah* and *peshitus*, he can then understand the concept of the Maharal that *teshuvah* is about returning to *peshitus*.

4 – Returning To Our Beginning Point

A fourth part of inner *teshuvah*, the Maharal says, is to return to our very beginning point ("*nekudah raishis*").

When one does *teshuvah* only a partial level, he has not yet returned to his beginning. But we ask Hashem that we be returned to Him in "*teshuvah shelaimah*", in "complete *teshuvah*", as we *daven* in Shemoneh Esrei: החזירנו בתשובה שלימה לפניך "Return us, in complete repentance, before You." What is "complete *teshuvah*"? It means to return to the very beginning point.

This is the depth of the *avodah* of doing *teshuvah*. If one returns himself to the beginning point, he will surely arrive at Torah and Hashem. If he doesn't return to Torah and to Hashem after doing *teshuvah*, he was missing complete *teshuvah*.

These four parts of doing *teshuvah* define the *avodah* of *teshuvah* for one who cares about his soul. It is about where we are supposed trying to return ourselves to.

If someone is only concerned with returning from sinful actions and to stop committing the actions of sin, this is wonderful, but to remain at that level is a *teshuvah* on the level of the physical body alone; he remains in *katnus mochin* (small-mindedness).

One who cares for his soul is concerned with returning to the higher intellect of the soul, which is the holy Torah, given on Yom Kippur; he is concerned with returning himself to *yashrus*, to the most complete level of *teshuvah*. He is not satisfied with the partial level of *teshuvah*; he seeks these

four levels of *teshuvah*, climbing higher and higher through these levels, until he reaches the highest level of *teshuvah*, where he returns to his beginning point.

In Summary

Doing *teshuvah* on a deep level requires one to first return himself to the higher intellect of Torah, then to *yashrus*, then to *peshtus*, and then to the beginning point. This is the meaning of “Return, Yisrael, to Hashem your G-d.”

Thus, the deeper part of our *avodah* in doing *teshuvah* is to return to these four places in the soul described: to recognize that we have fallen from these lofty places in our soul, and to then bring ourselves back.

All of this is based on the words of the Maharal.

Returning The Soul

Now that we have explained where one must “return” to in doing *teshuvah* – returning his body and soul – now let us reflect about the very concept of *teshuvah*, to “return”. We have explained to *where* we must return to; now let us think about *what it means to return*.

It is clear how we can return our body; we can go from place to place and return our body to where it was. But how do we use our soul’s power to “return”?

If one has never yet wondered about this, he is attempting to do *teshuvah* with a power that he has never yet recognized. He will be able to do *teshuvah* on the physical level, such as by refraining from sin, but he will not be able to go beyond that level. *Teshuvah* involves regret and resolving not to sin again. These are powers of our soul, so we need to know how to use our soul’s power to return, in order to really do *teshuvah*.

The Inherent Force of “Teshuvah” Throughout All of Creation

What is the soul’s power to return? *Teshuvah* is an all-compassing power that applies to all of Creation, for all of Creation needs to return to its Source.

The Jewish people are commanded with a *mitzvah* to do *teshuvah*. Gentiles do not have *mitzvah* to do *teshuvah*, but they are capable of doing *teshuvah*; Adam, Kayin, and Noach all did *teshuvah*, and all the gentile nations who come from them inherited as well the power to do *teshuvah*.

But can an animal do *teshuvah*? Can a plant or an inanimate object do *teshuvah*? It seems that there is no concept of *teshuvah* by them. Can an animal sin? Does it commit a sin if it cohabits with a human? Can a plant commit a sin? Can a rock or any other inanimate object commit a sin?

Obviously, there is no concept of sin when it comes to animals, plants, and inanimate objects. So what does it mean that there is a concept of *teshuvah* that applies to all the different kinds of creations?

However, this is not a question, when we truly understand the concept behind *teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* is a power of the soul, and all creations have souls, so every creation has a power to return, regardless of whether it sins or not. Of course, the main concept of *teshuvah* is to repent over sins. But there is an inherent ability in all of creation to do *teshuvah* – the power to “return” to a source.

With the Jewish people, it is a commandment to do *teshuvah*. Gentiles, who are not commanded to do *teshuvah*, are still able to do *teshuvah*. We find a concept of “*teshuvah*” by animals as well, because the Gemara says that birds yearn to return to their original nest, since they want to see where they came from. A dog laps up its saliva, and it keeps coming back and returning to it. These are examples of the power to return, which comes from the nature of *teshuvah* that is ingrained in all creations.

Even inanimate objects do *teshuvah*. The Maharal and the Vilna Gaon write that fire is naturally rising higher, because it yearns to return to its source, which is in Heaven. Fire is an inanimate object, yet it has a yearning to return to its source.

All of creation has this nature to return to its source. When we only have a superficial perspective towards *teshuvah*, we cannot fathom why there is a concept of *teshuvah* with animals, plants, and inanimate objects. But when we realize what *teshuvah* is from an inner perspective, we know that *teshuvah* is about returning to its source and how all of Creation seeks to return.

Thus, repenting over sins is only the external aspect of *teshuvah* is to repent over sin. From this perspective alone, one sinned and *teshuvah* seems like some novel concept that he must come up with. The inner aspect of *teshuvah*, though, is not to come up with anything novel. It is a power inherent in all of Creation, so it is nothing new.

Even more so, the Sages state that *teshuvah* is one of the seven things that were created before the world⁷⁹. In other words, all of creation was created from *teshuvah*, and therefore, all of the creations contain *teshuvah* as part of their inherent makeup: The yearning to return to our source.

***“Shov”*: The Soul’s Power To Return**

However, when a person sins, he loses this yearning to return to his source.

What, then, is the *avodah* of becoming a *baal teshuvah*? The *avodah* is to reveal from within oneself our inherent power to return. It is not some new power that we need to come up with and develop. Rather, it exists in potential form, deep inside the soul. This is called the power of “*shov*” (return) in the soul.

⁷⁹ *Pesachim 54a*

Thus, if one thinks he has to “come up” with the idea of *teshuvah* over his sins - as if it is something novel - his *teshuvah* will only be temporary inspiration, and it will probably not last after Yom Kippur. But if one reveals the inherent power of *teshuvah* from within his soul (“*shov*”), such *teshuvah* can last for the entire year, for now that he has revealed it, it remains with him long afterward.

It is easy to make resolutions during these days, because our minds are clearer and there is also inspiration in our heart. But after these days end, there are few who can remain with these lofty aspirations. The inspiration we had was strong while it lasted, but it doesn't remain with us for the rest of the year. But if one worked on himself to reveal the power in his soul to “return”, this power of “return” will escort him during the rest of the year as well, long after the ten days of repentance are over.

Teshuvah in the depths of the soul is the fact that all of creation yearns to return to its source. What prevents a person from accessing this deep source of *teshuvah*? It is essentially our power of *bechirah* (free will) that prevents us, when we choose evil; but when one purifies himself, he uses his *bechirah* to choose good, and he yearns for good - he yearns for Hashem. He reveals a power in even his *nefesh habehaimis* to return to its source, and even more so, he reveals the depth of his *neshamah*, which yearns to return not only to our source, but to “Our Father in Heaven.”

This kind of *teshuvah* is called the soul's power of “*shov*”, return. It puts a person into contact with the inherent power of all Creation that yearns to return to our source.

The Maharal says that all of Creation wants to return to Hashem, but in man, this nature is more concealed, due to man's power of free choice, which prevents him from accessing his deep nature to return. But when man purifies himself and he reaches the points of the soul of *seichel nivdal*, *yashrus*, *peshitus*, and *nekudah raishis*, he then reveals the simple nature of the soul of “*shov*”, which wants to return to Hashem.

Once this aspect of the soul is revealed outward, it remains with the person on a more permanent basis, as opposed to just inspiration that comes and goes.

Why is it that most people do not reveal this kind of *teshuvah* in themselves? It is because most people view *teshuvah* as being just repentance from sin. Most people are not aware that *teshuvah* is also about returning to the higher aspects of our self: *seichel nivdal*, *yashrus*, *peshitus*, and *nekuda raishis*. Therefore, the soul's power of “*shov*” usually remains unrevealed and concealed from the person, and all he will know of is inspiration. The resolutions that he makes as he is inspired usually will not last for the rest of the year, because they are not coming from the point of “*shov*” in the soul.

If All Creations Repent, What Sets Apart Humans From Animals?

All people have the power of “*shov*”, for it is contained in all creations. How, then, is man different from other creations?

Man can either keep returning to his sin again (like someone who says “I will repent, and I will sin” – he uses *teshuvah* as a way to sin), or, he can purify himself and do *teshuvah* over his sins; and even more so, he can do *teshuvah* from the point of “*shov*” in himself.

But this still does not answer the question. Any sensible person who thinks about it can wonder: If *teshuvah* applies to all creations – people, animals, plants, and the non-living – is *teshuvah* in humans unique from the other kinds of *teshuvah*?

If we reflect into it, we can see what sets apart humans from all other creations, with regards to *teshuvah*. Man is called “*medaber*”, a social creature. This enables him to recite *Viduy*, to confess, over sins. This *Viduy* can come from the power of “*shov*” in the soul. It sets man apart from all other creations, who cannot speak or verbalize their *teshuvah*.

The Teshuvah That Is Unique To The Jewish People

Even more so, the *teshuvah* that a Jew is capable of contains an even higher aspect than this.

It is written, “Return, Yisrael, up until (*ad*) Hashem, your G-d.” The Gemara explains that there are two levels of “*ad*”, “up to Hashem: There is “*ad v’lo ad b’klal*”, “up until, but not including until”, and “*ad v’ad b’klal*”, “until, and including until”. The Gemara explains that an individual who does *teshuvah* can only do *teshuvah* “up until” Hashem, but not further than that point; whereas *teshuvah* of on a congregational level can reach all the way until Hashem.

Furthermore, Rabbi Akiva said, “Praiseworthy is Yisrael, for Yisrael is purified by their Father in Heaven.” Only the Jewish people are purified on Yom Kippur by Hashem. This is the Jew’s unique power of *teshuvah*: to return all the way “until” Hashem.

Thus, the power of “*shov*” in our *nefesh habehaimis*, which is the power that all creations have, can only reach up until/*ad* Hashem, but not beyond that. It cannot actually return us all the way to Hashem. Beyond that level, we can do *teshuvah* through *Viduy*, which utilizes our aspect of *medaber* that sets us apart from all other creations.

But all of this is not yet the Jew’s unique power of *teshuvah*. The Jew can do *teshuvah* all the way up “until” Hashem; he is purified by his Father in Heaven on Yom Kippur, as Rabbi Akiva says. He can stand “before Hashem”, on Yom Kippur.

In what way? When it is Yom Kippur, one is able to feel simply that he is standing in front of Hashem. As proof, everyone is hoping that Hashem will forgive him as he stands before Him on Yom Kippur.

As for one who doesn’t feel the presence of Hashem on Yom Kippur, he will still be purified through the “pure waters” that are sprinkled upon his soul on Yom Kippur, but he won’t become purified in his very being.

“Return, Yisrael, up until Hashem your G-d” includes the entire process of *teshuvah*, both on our external layers and our inner layers. The most external layer of *teshuvah* is to repent on the level of the physical body, which can refrain from sinning. The more inner layers of *teshuvah* involve the soul, where one must return the soul’s abilities, as we explained [these were the four aspects explained by the Maharal]. And finally, there is the complete level of *teshuvah*, to return to Hashem Himself, as we pray: “Return us, Hashem, in complete repentance, before You.” The place which our *neshamah* must ultimately return to is, to reach the simple recognition of the reality of Hashem.

During the rest of the year there are various obstacles that prevent us from feeling that simple reality, but on Yom Kippur where we are forgiven by Hashem, we can easily relate to feeling Hashem’s presence.

If one doesn’t feel Hashem’s presence on Yom Kippur, he is still atoned for on Yom Kippur, but this atonement and purity will not have penetrated into his entire being, and he will be left with traces of sin even after Yom Kippur. He will not become like a ‘fresh piece of paper’ after Yom Kippur that he could have merited on this day.

In Conclusion

May Hashem give us the strength to recognize the definition of *teshuvah*, to recognize how our soul can do *teshuvah*, so that we can completely reach the meaning of “Return Yisrael up until Hashem your G-d” - and may it be an “ad” that is “ad v’ad b’klal” (up until, and including until): that we should do *teshuvah* “all the way until Hashem”.

May we all merit to be sealed for a good year.

2.3 | Ten Days of Seeking Hashem Himself⁸⁰

“Melech HaMishpat” – The Time In Which Hashem Is Actually Judging

During the rest of the year in *Shemoneh Esrei* we say **מֶלֶךְ אֱוֶהֶב צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט**, “The King Who loves righteousness and justice”, but during the Ten Days of Repentance, we say **הַמֶּלֶךְ הַמִּשְׁפָּט**, “The King of Justice.” Although Hashem is Judge during the entire year, His actual judgment is during the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*.

This needs understanding; there are many explanations of this concept. The *Kol Bo* writes in the name of the *Raavad* is that we need to *daven* directly to Hashem, and not to His *middos* (This is based on the words of the *Sifrei*). Hashem has many *middos*, and one of His *middos* is that He has *mishpat*, that He judges. One of the ways Hashem runs the world is through *hanhagas hamishpat* (through means of justice).⁸¹ *Chazal* state that “Hashem and His *middos* are one”; and “Hashem and His will are one”, and “*Hashem and His wisdom are one*”. Thus, during the Ten Days of Judgment, Hashem’s judgment is part of Hashem Himself, so to speak, and that is why Hashem is called **מֶלֶךְ הַמִּשְׁפָּט** during these days.

These are the words of the *Raavad*. We will try to understand his words on a practical level, in a way that helps us understand how to approach *Aseres Y’mei Teshuvah*.

How We Should Approach The 13 Middos of Hashem

During these ten days of *Teshuvah*, Hashem is particularly close by; “*Seek Hashem where He is found.*” There are two ways how we can try to find Hashem during these days [either through seeking His *middos*, or through seeking Hashem Himself].

These are days of *tefillah*, in which we turn to Hashem, to His 13 *middos*. We are mainly turning to Hashem’s *middas harachamim* (attribute of mercy). We want a good year, we want to be written in the book of *tzaddikim* - we want to be written in the book of life and to get livelihood and blessing. So from all the *middos* of Hashem, we are mainly turning to His *middas harachamim*.

If so, it can happen that a person is entirely *davening* to Hashem’s *middas harachamim*, and not to Hashem Himself!

If a person only *davens* to Hashem’s *middos*, he has lost the purpose of all these days. Our *tefillos* are important, but, it’s very possible that a person is using all these days of *Yomim Noraim* as a way to get what he wants, to have a good year, and he never uses it to get closer to Hashem. During these

⁸⁰ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-099-ten-days-seeking-hashem-himself>

⁸¹ See the end of *sefer Daas Tevunos of the Ramchal* in which it is explained that the two ways how Hashem runs the world are either through *Hanhagas HaMishpat* (justice) and *Hanhagas HaRachamim* (compassion).

days, Hashem's *middos* are indeed more revealed, for these are days of *rachamim*. But if all a person is busy with is Hashem's *middos* and he never turns to Hashem Himself - he has lost the whole purpose of these days.

These days of doing *teshuvah*, which are days of *mishpat* (justice), are thus not just about *mishpat*. There is a King who is delivering the *mishpat*. We can turn to Hashem to save us, but that's only the lower aspect of how we relate to His *mishpat*. The higher aspect of it is to turn directly to the King, and not to His *middos* – in other words, that we seek Hashem Himself, and not to be concerned solely of how His *middos* will affect us.

It is written, “Seek Hashem where He is found”, and Chazal say this is referring to *Yomim Noraim*. The lower aspect of this is to turn to the 13 *middos* of Hashem, which are more revealed in *Yomim Noraim*. These days of *Yomim Noraim* can reveal the depth of His *middos*, where we can feel how Hashem has *rachamim*. While this has a gain to it, it is not the goal. Closeness to Hashem is not fully achieved by dwelling on His merciful *middos*. It is rather by seeking to reveal Hashem Himself, the King Himself, during these days.

During the rest of the year, Hashem is more hidden; He is called *Keil mistater*, “a hidden Almighty”. But during Elul He is more “found”, as the possuk says. So it's not about revealing His *middos* more, which is what I get out of Hashem. It is about finding Hashem Himself, which means that I can become close to Hashem during these days simply because I can want the King Himself.

During the rest of the year, Hashem is revealed through His *middos*, while Hashem Himself is hidden, so to speak. He hides himself, but He reveals Himself through his *middos*. That is during the rest of the year. But during *Yomim Noraim*, Hashem reveals Himself more, and He is no longer hidden. It is not just that He is close by. It is that it is easier for us to recognize Him as reality.

It is not simply days in which we can feel closer to Hashem, days in which we can feel Hashem's *rachamim* more, and days in which our tefillos are more readily heard, although this is certainly true. It is something deeper. It is about **revealing the Creator as a Creator**, and not just about what I get out of the Creator.

Yom Kippur – Entering Hashem's Inner Chamber

The 10 Days of *Teshuvah* took place in between the first and second Luchos, after the sin with the Golden Calf. We fell from the level of *Ain Od Milvado* which was revealed at Har Sinai. We were like *beinonim*, hanging in the balance in between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur* for a good judgment.

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement for sin, is when we are purified from sin; “Before Hashem you shall be purified.” On *Rosh HaShanah*, Hashem remembers everything since the beginning of Creation, which are hidden from us, because while we forget, Hashem doesn't forget. What doesn't Hashem forget? Hashem doesn't forget His promise to us, which is that even sins don't separate from Him. We think our sins separate us from Him, and thus we feel impure from our sins, but on

Yom Kippur, we enter into such closeness with Hashem that we are in His inner chamber, in which He remembers that we are entirely pure, and that sins cannot divide us from Him.

“Before Hashem, you shall be purified.” Chazal also say about *Yom Kippur*, “The essence of the day atones.” We enter into Hashem’s innermost chamber, like when the *Kohen Gadol* entered the *Kodesh HaKodashim*, and there, all was atoned. The atonement can only happen in that innermost chamber, because it is there that we enter into complete closeness with Hashem, where nothing divides us from Him, not even sin. We do not have the *Avodah* of the *Kohen Gadol* anymore, but we remain with the idea of it, which is that we can enter into the innermost chamber of Hashem on *Yom Kippur*, where we are forgiven.

But in order to enter this innermost chamber on *Yom Kippur*, it can only be done if we seek Hashem Himself, and not just to desire the mercy of His *middos*. We need to enter into the deepest possible chamber with Hashem, like the *Kodesh Kodashim*, which is not by dwelling on Hashem’s *middos* and what we get out of His mercy, but rather to instead be entirely focused on Hashem Himself.

This is the concept known as “*Retzonenu lir’os es Malkeinu*” – “It is our desire to see the King”.

Our innermost desire should be focused not on meriting Hashem’s compassion, not on meriting a good year, not on meriting a forgiveness from our sins – although all these things are truthful; the main intention we need to have during these days is to “Return to Hashem, your G-d.” We need to return to Hashem Himself; that is the main aspect of all our *Avodah* during these days.

We do not have the *Kohen Gadol*, the *Avodah*, or the *Beis HaMikdash*. But the *Avodah* remains in our own soul. In our own soul, we can enter into the innermost chamber, which is where we turn to Hashem Himself. May we merit from the Creator to search for the innermost point of everything.

We should seek a good year, a good year to both our physical and spiritual situation – but we must mainly seek the higher goal of all of this, which is to recognize Hashem’s reality. May we all merit to seek the purpose of Creation, that it become revealed, and this will be our ultimate *gmar chasima tovah* to all of *Klal Yisrael*.

2.4 | *Getting to the Root of Sin* ⁸²

Asking Forgiveness From Hashem For What Caused Us To Sin

מחל לנו מלכינו כי פשענו “Forgive us, our King, for we have been negligent to sin.”

When a person asks Hashem to be forgiven for his sins, this can either be done in a superficial way, or through an inner understanding.

The superficial approach is that a person asks Hashem to forgive him for the act of the sin he committed, because he does not want to be punished. We know that intentional sins have a more severe punishment than unintentional sins. Thus, a person is afraid of retribution, so he wants to be forgiven from his sins, in order that he should not suffer as a result of his sins.

The inner understanding of a person who asks Hashem to be forgiven, though, is because we should want to be forgiven for the evil motivations that caused the sin in the first place. This is not simply about becoming aware if the sin was committed because the person was overtaken by a desire, or if a person did it to anger Hashem. It is rather referring to a deeper motivation – the negative *ratzon* (will) that is behind the sin. If a person would have had more clarity of *ratzon* and he would have thought more beforehand with *hisbonenus* (deep mental reflection), he wouldn't have to come to sin in the first place.

Let us examine what is going on inside the mind of a person who sins because he was overtaken by desire, as well as what is going on inside the mind of a person who sins intentionally to anger Hashem.

When Desires For Sin Overpower The Mind

When a person sins because he was overtaken by a desire, this is really because his emotion of desire overtook his rational, thinking intellect. His emotions are ruling over his *daas* (maturity of mind), and therefore desires are able to overpower his mind.

The person sinned because he did not develop his power of holy *ratzon* (will) and *seichel* (intellect). Had his holy *ratzon* and *seichel* been properly developed, emotions wouldn't be able to overtake him. In fact, even if his holy *ratzon* would weaken, his *seichel* intellect can still save him when he is tempted to sin and gain control over the emotion of desire.

⁸² <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-064-getting-root-sin>

The One Who Sins Intentionally

As for a person who sins intentionally to anger Hashem, what is going on in his psyche, deep down?

It is really because man has a nature to oppose anything that challenges him from the outside (in Hebrew, *hisnagdus*). Chavah was called *ezer k'negdo*, a “helpmate opposite him”, because a woman’s nature opposes a man’s nature; the idea we see from this is that man is opposed by anything that challenges him from outside himself. But even before Chavah was created, man feels opposition towards anything that challenges him from the outside.

On its basic level, a person can use this power to oppose whatever opposes him, in order to deal with his simple challenges. This power can be further developed to fight off harder challenges. But when this power of opposing challenges is used by man for evil, a person comes to oppose the will of Hashem, *chas v'shalom*.

It can get to the point that a person feels more alive from these kinds of challenges, and he derives his whole vitality in life from always opposing Hashem’s will, *chas v'shalom*. That is the depth behind a person who sins to anger Hashem - it is because he has gotten so used to challenging anything that opposes him, that it has even become his whole sense of vitality in life.

Inner Oppositions

A deeper kind of opposition, however, is when a person feels opposition within his own self! The root of all war and strife in the world is because of this human trait of feeling opposed by challenges. But the deeper kind of opposition is when people feel opposed within their own self. Every person can feel contradictory desires in himself. Generally, this is called *yetzer tov* and *yetzer hora* – the forces of good and evil that are within man. But the deeper understanding is that we have different *retzonos* (desires) in us which contradict each other.

Reb Yisrael Salanter said that there are two kinds of *yetzer hora* – a force of evil that comes from outside of man, which is called the angel known as the *Yetzer Hora/Satan/Angel of Death*, and an evil that is more within.⁸³

The outer force of evil is the angel known as the *yetzer hora*, and it resides in the left chamber of the heart. It is a “voice” that tells a person to commit a sin or not to do the *mitzvos*.

The more inner, deeper force of evil is within one’s *middos* (character traits). Even when a person wants to do a *mitzvah*, at the same time, he also doesn’t want to do it. His motivations are mixed with both pure and impure motivations. For example, he wants to learn Torah, but at the same time,

83 To clarify, the Rav explains in Da Es Atzmecha that evil is never a part of the actual self of a Jew, for the true self of a Jew is his pure neshamah, which is inherently good. Rather, all evil exists outside the actual inner self. Even the more inner kind of evil [impure motivations] is not within the self; it is outside the actual self, and beyond that is a more outer kind of evil, which is the voice that tells a person to commit evil.

he doesn't want to learn. He wants to do a *mitzvah*, but at the same time, he also doesn't want to do it.

Thus, everything has in it some degree of inner opposition coming from within the person. If a person doesn't feel his inner contradictions, he doesn't understand properly why he should ask Hashem to be forgiven from sin; we can consider this to be like "immersing in a *mikveh* while holding a *sheretz*" [insect that renders him impure].

In other words, in order for a person to do *teshuvah* for his sins, he has to know the reason that caused the sin, and from gaining that perspective, he can properly ask Hashem for forgiveness. He is not asking Hashem to forgive him merely for the **act** of sin committed, so that he can avoid the punishment of what will result from the sin.

Rather, he is asking to be forgiven for the **reason** that caused the sin [which was that he didn't listen to his inner oppositions and thus he didn't come to the point of deciding how to act properly].

When we ask Hashem to be forgiven from sin, the basic requirement is to fulfill the four parts of the *Teshuvah* process: to abandon the sin, regret it, confess it, and resolve not to do it again. But in order for this *teshuvah* process to start, a person has to also touch upon the root reason that caused him to sin.

Becoming Aware of Inner Oppositions

When a person lives a more inner kind of life, when he lives in a world of clarity towards his soul – and there are levels within levels in this – he understands that for every ability in his soul, there is another power that opposes it. For example, when a person feels a *ratzon* to do something good, he should also be able to feel that at the same time he also doesn't want to do it.

If he doesn't notice it, it might be because he is so immersed in what he is doing that he doesn't pause to listen to his inner forces that are really clashing within him. Usually, when people are immersed in what they are doing - and thus they don't listen to others - it is not coming from the fact that they are so busy listening to their inner voices.

It is rather because they are focused on listening to **one** voice alone inside themselves. This doesn't help a person gain the power of listening to what's going on deep inside himself. If a person would notice the **two** different voices inside him and listen to this opposition inside himself, he would discover that he can listen better to others when they argue with him, because he has gotten used to the concept of listening to different voices going on within a matter.

A person needs to listen to himself and hear the contradictory desires in himself, and this will also develop his power of listening to others.⁸⁴ When he has gotten used to listening to his own inner voices, he will discover that he listens better to others, and will be able properly hear out others' voices\ opinions in a matter. When people aren't able to listen to their own inner voices, they can't

⁸⁴ See *Getting To Know Your Individuality_ 10 - Inner Listening*; see also *Getting To Know Your Family_03*

either deal with others and be able to listen to them; when they come home to their family, they aren't able to listen properly to the different voices in their own household.

Most of the strife and arguments in today's times – which are usually not “for the sake of Heaven” - are not stemming from the actual argument at hand, but rather because one of the sides is not really *listening* to the other side. One of the sides is not prepared to listen to the other. When there is no listening, when one side of the argument doesn't try to understand the other, then of course, differences will erupt, and the arguing will be blown out of proportion.

We find this idea from the concept of how things are done in *Beis Din*, where each *dayan* has to hear both sides of the opposition, or else they cannot give a judgment. Whenever there is an argument, one has to understand two opposite views on the same situation. If not, a *dayan* is considered to be mentally bribed by one of the sides, because he has only come to understand that particular litigant he heard, and his judgment will naturally be swayed to rule in that person's favor. In order to mete out of a fair judgment, the Torah wants us to hear what both sides have to say.

There is a famous statement of Reb Yeruchem Levovitz: A person cannot kill someone. How then could Kayin kill Hevel? It was because he didn't realize that Hevel even existed! If a person doesn't stop to think that another person exists, he is able to kill him, because he is unaware that the other exists. This is not only true about murder. It applies to all arguments and strife. If a person can't feel his own inner oppositions, he will not either be able to hear other people's opinions that oppose him.

Developing Your Power of Opposition To Oppose Evil And Choose Holiness

Once a person becomes aware of his inner oppositions, he can develop his awareness further and then use his power of opposition for holiness. He can choose to use his power of opposition to fight the evil arguments of the *yetzer hora*. He can hear himself inside - two different voices going on - and decide between them. But this is only once he becomes aware of the two contradictory voices inside him. He can then be a 'judge' on the two 'parties' going on inside himself, after he has heard the arguments of each side.

The Ramchal writes that it “is the way of the wise to always think” – the depth behind this is that a truly wise person is always listening to his inner voices, and deciding between the two different forces inside them. This is not limited to thinking about if something is permissible according to *Halacha* or not. It means to become aware of our inner motivations and to notice the contradictory desires in yourself – to listen to yourself.

Even if you know you are doing something that is Halachically correct, ask yourself if your inner motivations in carrying out the act are pure.

Thus, if a person asks for forgiveness from Hashem for his sins in this blessing in Shemoneh Esrei of **סלה לנו**, and the reason for the sin still exists, it is pointless to ask Hashem for forgiveness. We must act from a pure place in our soul.

If we are in doubt about if a certain act is okay or not – even if it is Halachically correct, but we still feel uneasy about doing it, we should separate from it, and seek to purify ourselves internally.

In Conclusion

May we merit from Hashem to a true forgiveness from sin – not just to be forgiven from the actual act of sins, but that the reasons that motivated us to sin should be uprooted totally, and through this we should merit a spirit of purity upon the world with the coming of *Moshiach*, Amen.

2.5 | *Forgiving Others* ⁸⁵

Receiving Hashem's Forgiveness - If We Are Forgiving

The blessing of **לנו סלה** in *Shemoneh Esrei* concludes with **ברוך אתה ה', חנון המרבה לסלוח** – “Blessed are You, Hashem, Who is increasing to forgive.” Not only does Hashem forgive; He is “increasingly” forgiving.

Three times daily when *davening*, we ask Hashem to forgive us in *Shemoneh Esrei*. If so, we make this request thousands of times a year.

It is understandable that we ask every day for health, livelihood, for the redemption, etc. But why did *Chazal* establish that we should *daven* every day for forgiveness?

Imagine if a person would keep sinning against a friend. His friend wouldn't be able to forgive him. But Hashem is not like people. Hashem keeps forgiving us, even when the person keeps sinning against Him, again and again.

We have an *avodah* to resemble Hashem's *middos*, and this is how we “cleave” to Him. As explained earlier⁸⁶, if a person doesn't try to resemble Hashem's *middos* of mercy, he doesn't awaken Hashem's mercy. If a person doesn't forgive others, he can't merit Hashem's forgiveness, because he never awakened Hashem's trait of compassion towards him. If we cleave to Hashem by exercising good *middos*, we awaken Hashem's *middos* towards us.

Our *middos* are not Hashem's *middos*. When we have love or compassion for others, this does compare at all to Hashem's *middos* of love and compassion, which are endless. If so, what is our *avodah* to resemble Hashem's *middos*, when our good *middos* do not come anywhere near the level of Hashem's infinite *middos*? When we are compassionate, we connect ourselves to Hashem's compassion, and then we receive Heavenly illumination from Hashem's trait of compassion.

Man is a limited creation. Not only is his physical body is limited, but his emotions are also limited. Man can love, but how much can he love already? His love has limits. But if man connects himself to the love that Hashem has upon His creation, he connects himself to an infinite kind of love. It is not in our power to always love. But if we connect ourselves to Hashem's love, we can receive the power to love endlessly.⁸⁷

Let us reflect on the concept of how we are able to forgive others. It is really not in our power to forgive others, but if we connect ourselves to Hashem's endless *middos*, we are able to receive an endless power to forgive.

⁸⁵ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-065-forgiving-others>

⁸⁶ *Tefillah #063 – Mercy Towards Creation*

⁸⁷ *See Understanding Your Middos #016*

Why Should We Forgive Others?

If Shimon hurts Reuven, and Shimon asks Reuven to forgive him, why should Reuven forgive him? One reason is that Reuven won't want to appear like a cruel person. Indeed, *Chazal* say that a person who can't forgive is cruel. Maybe he doesn't want Shimon to get punished for his sin, so Reuven forgives him.

There is a much simpler reason why Reuven would forgive: he has compassion on Shimon. This is a purer motivation. He doesn't want Shimon to get punished, and therefore he doesn't want to be a cruel person, because he has compassion on Shimon.

However, there is a deeper reason why a person needs to forgive someone who has wronged him. Whenever a person wrongs another, he has really used his various soul abilities to harm the person; the soul is vast and complicated. The Vilna Gaon lists 70 root forces in the soul, and there are many branching abilities as well within the soul. Thus, we do not understand how complicated the soul is, and therefore we cannot understand why a person committed a certain hurtful action against us. That is the deep reason why we should forgive others.

Discovering Your Motivations

When a person lives superficially, and is asked why he committed a certain evil act against another person, he responds simply, "Because I like to do this kind of action", or "Because I hate this person", or "Because I'm afraid of him." But through the lens of *Chazal*, every action a person does is stemming from all kinds of inner motivations. There is never any one reason why a person does something.

To say this in slightly deeper terms, in every act, there are always two motivations – there is always some *lishmah* (pure motivations) involved and some *shelo lishmah* (impure motivations). If a person thinks into any action he does, he will discover that everything he does has in it both elements of *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah*.

For example, when a person gets up in the morning to *daven*, why does he get up in the morning? One reason is because he knows that Hashem has commanded him to do so. Another reason: Because his wife will get very angry at him if he stays in bed. Another reason: it's unpleasant to have to get woken up by others. Another reason: Because he doesn't want to get punished in *Gehinnom* for not *davening*. Another reason: Because he wants to *daven* so that Hashem can take him out of his troubles. Here is an example of how a simple act like why a person gets up in the morning to *daven* is really filled with all kinds of inner motives.

It is not enough to be aware of just the actions we do. We need to develop an inner sensitivity to the various motivations behind what we do. You can discover a lot about what goes on behind what you do. It is written, "*Your thoughts are very, very deep*" – Hashem created everything in Creation with the deepest wisdom. In a person's psyche as well, there can be an endless amount of motivations that a person can discover about himself the more he enters inward.

Chazal say, “Do not judge your friend until you reach his place.” The Kotzker zt”l said that you will never fully understand another person’s situation and therefore, you can’t judge him. A person doesn’t understand *himself* either! Most people don’t even understand even *one percent* of their true self! Even those who are immersed in inner *avodah* do not understand the soul of a person since the soul is beyond our human understanding.

Therefore, we cannot truly understand the depth of ourselves. We can notice things about ourselves and enter a bit inward, but we can’t get to the full depth of understanding our inner self. If a person thinks he understands what the soul is, this shows how much he doesn’t know the soul. The wisdom of the Torah is endless, and so is the soul of man endless, because man was created with Hashem’s wisdom. It is so deep! It is impossible to get to the full depth of our soul; it’s beyond human logic.

Chazal say that “the task is not upon you to complete, yet, this does not exempt you from the task.” Although we have an *avodah* to try to understand ourselves, we must understand that we do not understand ourselves fully. However, if a person takes the opposite extreme and he gives up on trying to understand himself because he knows that the soul is endlessly deep, this is being detrimental to himself. Such a person is running away from his entire inner *avodah*. We have an inner *avodah* to try to understand ourselves well, but we should be aware that we can’t get to the full understanding of the soul.

The Depth of Teshuvah – Becoming Self-Aware of Your Motivations

Therefore, doing *teshuvah* affects two aspects. We must do *teshuvah* over sins, over actions that did not comply with *halachah*. But we also need to do *teshuvah* as well as on the subtle motivations in what we do. This is because in order to come to a true recognition Hashem, we need to recognize ourselves. “*From my flesh I see G-d.*” Based on this, the Raavad writes that, we have an *avodah* to recognize our true self. Rav Saadya Gaon would do *teshuvah* each day on how much recognition of the Creator he reached; in a deeper sense, we need to do *teshuvah* over a lack of self-awareness, because this is directly related to how we relate to the Creator.

The more a person understands this concept – not just intellectually, but also from the soul’s view he will be more in touch with his motivations. Although he will not reach the depth of his motivations, he will at least be able to uncover a great amount of depth in himself. Most people, indeed, do not discover what their motivations are.

When Hashem wants us to do *teshuvah*, it is not just because He wants us to become aware of the deeds we have done. He wants us to discover what our motivations are and to recognize ourselves. A person will then see life through a whole different lens. This is a concept that, when it penetrates, shakes the soul and awakens it to this perspective.

Those who taught the methods of *avodah* (how to serve Hashem) possessed *yirah* (fear of Hashem). They were always afraid that their actions should be in line with *halachah*, but even more

so, they were always afraid that maybe they were lacking some degree of self-awareness. They were very wise of course, but on their level, they were always suspecting themselves that they did not have enough self-awareness.

The Power To Forgive

Getting back to our current topic – forgiving others – how can a person forgive another? If Shimon asks Reuven for forgiveness, how is Reuven able to draw forth inner strength to forgive? Let's say Reuven is clear what Shimon did to him, and he is also clear why Shimon did it. Is Reuven prepared to forgive him?

He might make all kinds of rationalizations why he should forgive him: "It's worth it to forgive him" (But maybe it's not really "worth it" for him to forgive him...) Or, "I'll forgive him, because I don't want him to get punished by Hashem". There can be all kinds of reasons why Reuven decides that it's worth it to forgive, but the entire issue will depend on how kindhearted Reuven is. If Reuven possesses a refined heart, he will forgive Shimon, but if he does not have a good-hearted nature, he won't find the strength to forgive.

But this is all being superficial. If a person lives a more inner kind of life, he knows that he doesn't even understand himself fully, no matter how hard he has tried to understand himself for the last 20 years. He knows that people are complicated, for there are layers upon layers within the soul. Do we really know why someone else wronged us? There is no way for us to really know. If we forgive another person because we think we know why he has hurt us, and from that understanding we forgive the person, then our forgiving isn't emanating from clarity.

Imagine if Shimon comes to Reuven and tells him, "I did something against you, but I don't want to tell you what it is." Can Reuven forgive him? He has no idea how he was wronged, so it's simple for him to forgive. This helps us understand the idea; it is easier to forgive when we are ignorant of what was really done to us. In the same vein, we can find the strength to forgive others, because we anyways do not really know why the person did what he did to 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 **חנון המרבה לסלוח** - to be forgiven by Hashem for our own sins.



YOM KIPPUR

3.1 | *Finding Favor Again By Hashem*⁸⁸

Tachanunim\Supplication: Finding Chein (Favor) By Hashem

כי קל שומע תפילות ותחנונים אתה – “For You Are The Almighty G-d that hears prayers and supplications.” We turn to Hashem with both *tefillah*, prayer, and *tachanunim*, supplication.

When it comes to *tachanunim* (supplication), there are two aspects. There is the factor of how much we *daven* for something (*kamus*\amount), and there is also the quality and depth that we are putting into our prayers (*eichus*\quality).

Tachanunim, a supplication, is to keep *davening* to Hashem again and again for something, as we see from the word *Vaeschanan* (And he [Moshe] implored), which comes from the word *tachanunim*; Moshe repeatedly kept begging Hashem in his prayers to go to Eretz Yisrael.

The word *tachanunim* is rooted in the word *chinam*, “free.” The Vilna Gaon writes that *tachanunim* is when one *davens* to Hashem and requests for something not due to any merits he has, but because he is asking Hashem to have mercy on Him and give him a free gift, a *matnas chinam*.⁸⁹

However, the depth of *tachanunim* is not to ask Hashem for a *matnas chinam*; it is not mainly about ‘getting’ something. *Tachanunim* is rooted in the word *chein*, to find favor. Our main aspiration in our *tefillos* should be to strive to regain favor with Hashem again. When a person sins, he loses his *chein* in Hashem’s eyes, and he needs to get it back. Through *teshuvah*, one can get back his *chein* in Hashem’s eyes.

Rabbeinu Yonah writes that there are 20 fundamental aspects of *teshuvah*, and one of them is *tefillah*, to pray for assistance in doing *teshuvah*. Included in this, Rabbeinu Yonah writes, is to *daven* for three things:

- 1) One part of it is to *daven* to Hashem for assistance in doing *teshuvah* over our sins and stop sinning.
- 2) The second part of it is to ask Hashem that we merit to return to Hashem, as a result of stopping to sin.
- 3) And the third part of it is to *daven* for when we do *teshuvah* is to *daven* to Hashem that we should regain our original *chein*, favor, in His eyes.

The third aspect is to be desirable again by Hashem. This is what is written, “*Chaim b’retzono*”, “Living by His will” – this describes one who is desirable by Hashem.

⁸⁸ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-135-finding-favor-again-hashem>

⁸⁹ See *Tefillah* #0114 – Asking For Reward.

Truly Desiring Hashem

Yemei Ratzon, the Days of Will, which are these days of Elul through *Yom Kippur*, are days in which one desires Hashem and yearns for Hashem, and Hashem desires us too especially during these days. As Rabbeinu Yonah writes, the purpose of doing *teshuvah* is that after sins are removed, we once again are desired by Hashem. This is the entire desire of the *tzaddikim*: to become desirable and favorable by Hashem.

This is the goal of all our *teshuvah*: to find *chein* by Hashem. The depth of this is not just because we hope to become desired again by Hashem. It is written, “*Just as water reflects one face to another, so is the heart of man to another.*” Hashem acts towards us how we feel towards Him; if we truly desire Him, He reciprocates.

How indeed can we *daven* that Hashem should desire us? The entire desire of the righteous is for Hashem, which implies that regular people don’t desire it as much. Yet, even if someone is not a *tzaddik*, he also wants to be close to Hashem. If so, why does Rabbeinu Yonah write that only the *tzaddikim* have a desire for Hashem?

The answer is: Only a *tzaddik* really desires it with his entire being. When a person has real pain over his sins and he’s ashamed, and he has all the 20 parts of *teshuvah* as Rabbeinu Yonah describes, he is one who *truly* desires Hashem. He is one who *truly* wants closeness with Hashem. Just as much as he wants Hashem, so will Hashem desire him, for Hashem will reciprocate.

But if someone is full of various desires in his life, and one of the desires on his list is that he wants to be close to Hashem and to also be desired by Hashem - but it’s not his main desire - he doesn’t have the real desire to have *chein* by Hashem. *Chaim b’retzono* is only when it is one’s entire desire in life to have a relationship with Hashem.

Yemei Ratzon is the time which clarifies a person’s true will. Deep down, we all want to be close to Hashem, for that is our soul’s essence. But our essence is usually hidden from us and not revealed. In the revealed layers of our will, the deep will of our soul which is to only want closeness to Hashem is often not revealed in our daily life.

Our Avodah on Yom Kippur: Holding Onto Our Deepest Ratzon

The main *Avodah* of these days, especially *Yom Kippur*, is to reveal our deepest *ratzon*, the *ratzon* to be close to Hashem – and to only desire that.

It is written, “*Their sins separated them*”; sins put a barrier on our relationship with Hashem, but we must have the fundamental understanding towards ourselves that sins are only on our outer layers, outside of our true self, for our true self always remains pure and holy. Deep down, in the point of our soul which is our very essence, it is “our will to do Hashem’s will” (“*Retzoinenu Laasos Retzoncha*”). Our inner will becomes more revealed to us on *Yom Kippur*. *Yom Kippur* atones, meaning, it reveals the deep will of a Jew.

However, the spiritual light on *Yom Kippur* is coming from Above; our *Avodah* on *Yom Kippur* is to connect ourselves to our inner point, to use the awesome time of *Yom Kippur* to help us connect to our soul.

Without striving to take the Heavenly illuminations of *Yom Kippur* and connect our soul to it, a person might want to be desired by Hashem, but it won't be enough to seal the connection.

To illustrate, Reuven might like Shimon very much, but Shimon doesn't always like Reuven. It's just a yearning that Reuven has for Shimon; it's a one-way street, and it is not a solidified relationship between them, in spite of the fact that there are great yearnings here on Reuven's part to become close to Shimon. But if Shimon likes Reuven too, he reciprocates the feelings, and then it's a real friendship.

So too, if we have a great desire for Hashem, but we don't get ourselves to become desired by Hashem, then although we have a great yearning for Him and we have a *ratzon* for Him, it doesn't cause anything permanent to happen. We must therefore yearn not only for closeness with Him, but to have a permanent relationship with Him, to desire a relationship in which we have *chein* by Him.

Sometimes a person can yearn very much for another and he sees that the other is not returning the feelings, until he eventually despairs on ever having a relationship. So too, a person might yearn so much for Hashem, yearning and yearning for Him, but he finds that he's not forming a lasting relationship with Hashem. The lesson we see from this is, that yearning for Hashem is not the purpose. The purpose of the yearning for Hashem is not just to yearn for Him and wish so much to be close to Him. It is to eventually arrive at a permanent relationship with Him.

On *Yom Kippur*, it is a special time in which the soul can feel the depth of Hashem's will towards him, and then he can connect his own *ratzon* with Hashem's *ratzon*; our *ratzon* can bond with His *ratzon*, and a lasting relationship can then be formed. This does not occur when one just wants to be close to Hashem; it will not be enough to want. There must be a connection with Hashem that is formed. It is to *truly* want, and when one *truly* wants, the will of the soul then bonds with Hashem's will, and then the bond becomes permanent in one's soul.

A relationship cannot be a one-way street. Both of them have to want each other. So too, if it is only we who have a desire for Hashem, but we haven't made ourselves desirable to Him, then although our desire for Him is present, His desire for us will not be there. In order for us to merit that Hashem reciprocates our desire for Him, we have to truly desire to have a permanent relationship with Him in which we should wish that we find *chein* by Him.

These words, when put into practice, can give a person an overhaul and help him live an inner kind of life. Our *Avodah* is not just about yearnings for Hashem, a will for closeness with Hashem, and to have inspiration. It is written, "*The soul cannot become full.*" Our soul isn't satisfied with just more and more yearnings for Hashem. We all yearn during these days; each to his own. Inspiration is just a cycle of elation going up and down. It doesn't last. We need to make it lasting.

The Greatest Love You Can Ever Know Of

Our soul will only find its serenity when we make ourselves desired by Hashem, and then we will really feel a reciprocal bond with Hashem that will be the most ultimately satisfying relationship we will ever know of. If one achieves it, he knows of more than just having feelings for Hashem; he will feel how Hashem feels towards him in return. The relationship with Hashem then goes from being a just one-way street to the real thing.

Naturally, people seek love in their families, from their spouse and from their children. That is the way of the world. But one when feels Hashem's love toward him, he feels a love greater than any love found on this world. Because Hashem is endless, His love for us is endless, and if one feels it, he feels that endless love. People are limited; our love is limited for each other. But Hashem's love is unlimited, for He has no limits. This is the ultimate *yishuv hadaas* (calmness) that those who serve Hashem in an inner way live with.

There are many people who wish to really serve Hashem and they yearn all the time to be close to Hashem, but they don't strive to make that into a permanent connection inside their soul; the inner reason behind this is because although they seek to be close to Hashem, they are not seeking to be desirable to Hashem. They get their *yishuv hadaas* when they have *seder* (orderliness) in their life, be it a *seder* every day in learning or from doing anything orderly that gives them fulfillment. But if *seder* is the main source of a person's *yishuv hadaas* in his life, it is only imaginary *yishuv hadaas*. A real feeling of *yishuv hadaas* only comes to a person when he truly seeks Hashem and feels His love toward him as a permanent part of his life.

This is also the depth behind forgiveness of our sins on *Yom Kippur*. To be cleansed from sins is when the barriers are removed, and then the soul finds itself naturally with Hashem.

In Conclusion

These words always were always applicable, but nowadays, it is especially relevant.

We live in *ikvesa d'meshicha*, in the era preceding *Moshiach*, which is the final 2000 years of the world; *Chazal* said there will be 2000 years of desolation, 2000 years of Torah, and 2000 years of *Moshiach*. This does not mean that this will take place in chronological order; rather, the periods of desolation, Torah, and *Moshiach* all overlap with each other at once. We can see it clearly in our times; there is much Torah going on, the future is imminent, yet as it unfolds, the world is really destroying itself with all of the desires that people are pursuing.

These days, more and more buildings and skyscrapers keep going up - and it will all be destroyed one day, because the desires of the world that people are pursuing will eventually destroy This World, whereupon a new world will be revealed in its place.

In the future it will be revealed a permanent connection with Hashem, but even in our own times we can still strive to live a life of *Ain Od Milvado* (Nothing besides for Hashem), to live with

Hashem in our life, and to feel His love, and that our only desire should be to be desired by Hashem and to have a permanent connection with Him in the soul.

The purpose of *Yom Kippur*, and the main request we need to have in all of our *tefillos*, is that we become desired by Hashem.

May we all merit a *gmar chasima tova*, to be sealed for a good year.

3.2 | *Yom Kippur – Disconnecting from the Pleasure of Sin*⁹⁰

A Day of Soul With No Body

It is written, “*For on this day you shall be forgiven and be purified.*” *Yom Kippur* is the time of purity, in which Hashem purifies the Jewish people. The words of Rabbi Akiva are well-known: “Praiseworthy are the Jewish people – before Whom are they purified, and Who purifies them? Just as a *mikveh* purifies those who are impure, so does Hashem purify the Jewish people.”

Let us think of how our purification process is compared to that of a *mikveh*. In the *sefarim hakedoshim*, it is brought that one should immerse in a cold *mikveh*, because the words “*mayim karim*” (cold water) has the same *gematria* (numerical value in Hebrew letters) as the word “*meis*” – “corpse.” In other words, when a person immerses in a cold *mikveh*, he is considered to be like a dead person.

What is the gain in being considered like a dead person? Hashem doesn’t want us to die – He wants us to live. A dead person cannot serve Him and do *mitzvos*. So what is the gain in being considered like “dead” when one goes to a cold *mikveh*?

There are many meanings behind this concept, but we will focus on just one point, with the help of Hashem.

What, indeed, is death? When a person dies, does he stop existing? We know that of course not. We are made up of a body and a soul; by death, the soul leaves the body, the body is buried and the soul rises to Heaven. So the whole concept of death is that the soul leaves the body.

If we think about it, this is what *Yom Kippur* is all about. We have a *mitzvah* on this day to fast, and our body is denied certain pleasures. We have to be like angels on this day – souls without a body. Only our body suffers from this, though – not our soul. The soul actually receives greater vitality on *Yom Kippur* (as the Arizal writes). Normally, we need to eat and drink physically in order to be alive, but on *Yom Kippur*, we receive vitality from above, and thus we do not need physical food or drink.

The Arizal would stay up all night on *Yom Kippur*. Simply speaking, this was because he didn’t want to take a chance of becoming impure at night (from nocturnal emissions). But the deeper reason behind his conduct was because *Yom Kippur* is a day in which we are angelic, and we don’t need sleep. *Yom Kippur* is a day of soul with no body.

On every Yom Tov, there is a *mitzvah* to eat. Although *Yom Kippur* is also a Yom Tov, we don’t eat, because it is a day of soul with no body. It is the only day of the year in which we live through

⁹⁰ Adapted from *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Yomim Noraim*, p.149
<http://www.bilvavi.net/english/yom-kippur-disconnecting-pleasure-sin>

our soul and not through our body. The rest of the Yomim Tovim involve *mitzvos* that have to do with our body.

It is also the only day of the year in which we resemble the dead. We wear white, and there are two reasons for this: the inner reason is because we are resembling the angels, and the external reason is because we want to remind ourselves of death, who are clothed in white shrouds. The truth is that these are not two separate reasons – they are really one and the same: a dead person is a soul with no body, just like an angel.

Let us stress the fact that we do not mean to remind ourselves of death in order to scare ourselves. Although there is a concept of holy fear, that is not our mission on *Yom Kippur*. *Rosh Hashanah* is actually scarier than *Yom Kippur*, because it is the day of judgment. The point of reminding ourselves of death on *Yom Kippur* is because *Yom Kippur* is a day in which one is a soul without a body, resembling an angel.

The Purity Available Only On Yom Kippur

That is the clear definition of *Yom Kippur*, and now we must think into what our actual *Avodah* is on this day. We mentioned before the custom to immerse in a cold *mikveh* before *Yom Kippur*. It seems that this is because when we immerse in cold water, we are considered dead, and thus we are purified. But on a deeper note, the death which a person must accept when he immerses in the *mikveh* is so that he can realize that he is really a soul, without a body. Hashem purifies us on *Yom Kippur* – when we consider ourselves to be like a soul with no body.

Our purity does not happen on *Rosh Hashanah* or on Succos. It does not happen on Pesach or on any other Yom Tov. We are purified only on *Yom Kippur* – the time in which we are a soul without a body.

The Lesson We Learn from Yom Kippur for the rest of the year

The *Gemara*⁹¹ brings that there are four categories of sin. Some sins require just *teshuvah*, while worse sins require *teshuvah* as well as *Yom Kippur*. The Kamarna Rebbe asked: If someone sins the day after *Yom Kippur*, must he wait a whole year until the next *Yom Kippur* when the effects of his sin are removed? He answered that although *Yom Kippur* atones one's sins, it is still possible for a person to make for himself during the year a "mini" *Yom Kippur*. How? If we understand what the concept of *Yom Kippur* is, we can learn for the rest of the year how to use this point.

There are people who look at *Yom Kippur* as "a day on the calendar", and as soon as *Yom Kippur* ends, they run to "go build their *sukkah*" (and maybe even earlier than this)...What remains from this holy day? The beautiful singing, the holy atmosphere, the feelings of elation? We do not mean

91 *Yoma* 86a

to detract from the importance of these things, but they are not the purpose of *Yom Kippur*. *Yom Kippur* is given to us so we can know how to use its power for the rest of the year.

When a person learns how to drive a car, he's not learning how to drive the car just for one day – he's learning how to drive for the rest of his life. The same has to go for *Yom Kippur*. How should we view *Yom Kippur*? What do we want to take out of it?

The simple way people view *Yom Kippur* is that we merit that our sins be forgiven. “*For on this day you shall be atoned from all your sins, before Hashem you shall be purified.*” This is the clear, simple concept of *Yom Kippur*. We cannot say this isn't true – but it is still not the inner point of *Yom Kippur*.

Yom Kippur is a time in which we take out a lesson for the rest of the year. It is a day in which we can come learn about how to live throughout the rest of the year without sin.

Maybe a person will counter: What does *Yom Kippur* have to do with the rest of the year? On *Yom Kippur* we are in *shul* all day, and it's almost impossible to sin. The day after *Yom Kippur*, we go back to routine, we're back on the street. How is it possible to live throughout the rest of the year without sinning?

However, *Yom Kippur* is not defined as a day in which it is impossible to sin. Although that is true, it is only the superficial layer of *Yom Kippur*. The essence of *Yom Kippur* is that our sins are forgiven, and that we are purified.

We don't just learn from *Yom Kippur* how we can avoid sin for the rest of the year. We learn from *Yom Kippur* *how to cleanse ourselves from a sin, after we fail.*

A person definitely has to protect himself as much as possible from a sin, but we have to be concerned as well that if we do fall to a sin, that we should know how to deal with the setback, to be able to uplift ourselves even though we have failed.

Compare this to someone who doesn't get himself car insurance. He's confident that he won't get into an accident, so it's not worth it for him to buy insurance for his car. Now, if this is because he has a high level of *emunah*, that's wonderful. But if he doesn't have a high level of *emunah*, then all is fine and well only until he gets into an accident. Then he has to pay a heavy sum to fix up his car.

So of course a person has to make sure that he won't come to sin during the coming year, and that it should be a year without sin, with the help of Hashem. But if *chas v'shalom* one does fail to a sin, how should he help himself? He shouldn't wait until next *Yom Kippur*. He can learn from *Yom Kippur*, now, how he can purify himself from sin throughout the rest of the year.

Thus, preparing for *Yom Kippur* is not just a preparation for one day alone. It is essentially how to prepare for the rest of the year – that if we *chas v'shalom* fall to a sin, we should know how to get up from it and purify ourselves.

However, we need to understand: That would be fine if we are totally a soul during the rest of the year without a body, but don't we have a body as well? How then can we learn from *Yom Kippur* as a

lesson for the rest of the year, when on *Yom Kippur* we are totally a soul with no bodily drives, and during the rest of the year we have a body?

In order to answer this question, we need to know what the inner essence of this holy day is.

Disconnecting Completely From Impurity

It is written,⁹² “*And I will sprinkle upon them pure waters.*” Hashem sprinkles upon us “water” that purifies us. From a superficial perspective, it seems that this resembles how a person’s impurity from being contaminated to a corpse gets removed by having the *parah adumah* sprinkled upon him. But the inner depth to this purification process is as follows.

In order for one’s sins to be forgiven by Hashem, it is well-known that he needs three conditions: regretting the sin, confessing the sin, and resolving not to commit the sin again. All of these make sense. Regret makes sense, because if a person doesn’t feel bad that he sinned, why should he be forgiven? Confessing the sin is a little harder to understand why it is necessary; and resolving not to sin again is so that he shouldn’t just go back to his old ways.

That is the superficial understanding, but there is greater depth to this.

We can learn from our first redemption, our redemption from Egypt, on how we can disconnect from impurity.

Sins are impurity. The first impurity which the Jewish people went through was in Egypt. When the time came to exit Egypt, they disconnected from the impurity there, and then they were fit to receive the Torah. That was the first cleansing process which the Jewish people went through – a cleansing from the 49 Gates of Impurity.

Hashem commanded the Jewish people that we have no more reason to fear Egypt’s oppression on us, and that we will never see them bear upon us again⁹³. What is the depth to this? Simply, it was to calm them, that they shouldn’t fear Egypt. That is true, but the hidden inner point here is that when we left the impurity of Egypt, we gained an ability to totally disconnect from evil and impurity. Because we were promised by Hashem that we will never be oppressed by Egypt again, we were able to totally disconnect from impurity.

Confessing Without Regretting Is Pointless

Rav Dessler *zt”l* writes that even on *Yom Kippur*, when a person is saying *viduy* (confession of his sins), he might be really having a downfall all along, rather than growing from it.

How can this be? Isn’t he fulfilling the *mitzvah* to say *viduy*?

⁹² *Yechezkel* 36:25

⁹³ *Shemos* 14:13

The answer to this is that as he is saying *viduy*, he is remembering his sins and then experiencing them again; and he has some good memories...he hasn't yet disconnected from them, and he still gets a little nostalgic when he revisits those experiences in his mind. Such a person is ruining himself in the process of trying to fix himself!

Without truly regretting the past sin before one says *viduy*, the *viduy* becomes a person's downfall, and instead of growing spiritually, the person remembers his past sins. For example, if a person *rachmana litzlon* (May Hashem have mercy) saw an improper sight and he is trying to do *teshuvah* over it, he thinks about the improper sight again and stumbles again.

But if a person has true regrets over the sin, then every time he remembers the sin, he is filled with pain and remorse. He realizes what he lost by sinning, and it is no longer enjoyable to think about it. When a person loses \$100,000, the mere memory of such a loss is very painful. People love to remember their past positive experiences, but no healthy person likes to think about his past negative experiences.

A person committed an *aveirah*, and he enjoyed himself too while he was at it. If he truly regrets what he did, he will find that what was once joy to him has now turned into pain. It's like someone who stole a lot of money and ended up in jail. Every time he thinks about the money he stole, he groans in sadness, and he does not look at it as a sweet memory. He realizes that he didn't gain anything by stealing the money, and all he did was that he landed himself in prison.

Thus, if one confesses the sin before he regrets it, it's pointless, because he still remains with the pleasure he had from the sin and savors it. As he confesses it, he remembers those "good times", *rachmana litzlan*, from the sin. Sure, he has some pain from it too when he remembers it, but he remembers the enjoyment as well. He's confessing the sin, but while he's at it he's enjoying the memories.

In order for a person to have a true *viduy*, he has to first build up his regret over the sin. And what indeed is that regret supposed to be?

To feel regretful over the sin, a person has to think about how much he lost out on by sinning. By sinning, he gave up eternal rewards. When a person thinks about this deeply, he can come to the recognition that the sin was truly a loss for him, and it pains him to think about it. *Now* he can confess the sin. Without coming to this feeling of regret, he resembles what is written, "*In his mouth and lips he honors Me, but his heart is far from Me.*"⁹⁴ The *possuk* is referring to how a person confesses his sins, yet he's still connected to them.

The Meaning of Regret: Giving Back The Evil Enjoyment

We have thus learned that the depth of regretting a sin is to erase the pleasure that one had from it. When a person sins, on what he is doing *teshuvah* for? Simply, it is because of the act he

⁹⁴ *Yeshayahu 29: 13*

committed. This is true, of course, but it is still only the lower aspect of *teshuvah*. The inner essence of *teshuvah*, though, is as follows.

In this physical world, nothing can be taken for free. If someone steals, at some point he will have to give it back. If someone took pleasure from this world that he wasn't supposed to take – it must be given back.

How can one return his wrongful pleasure he had? He has to come to the same amount of pain as the enjoyment he felt from the sin. Only by countering the evil pleasure with true remorse, equal in strength, can one uproot the evil pleasure which he partook from. Without experiencing pain equal to how much he enjoyed it, he has basically stolen pleasure from the Creator. It as *Chazal*⁹⁵ state, “Anyone who enjoys this world without a blessing, it is as if he stole from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.” How much more so does this apply to one who commits a sin and enjoyed himself at it; he has stolen this wrongful pleasure which he was not supposed to have, and it is upon him to fix this up.

When someone steals, he has a *mitzvah* to return the stolen object; it won't be enough if he just feels bad that he stole, or that he confesses what he did and resolves never to do it again. He has to actually return what he stole! The same is true with one's sins toward Hashem. If a person took wrongful pleasure from a sin, it's not enough to feel bad about it – he has to return what he took. He can return it by feeling pain equal to the amount of enjoyment he had from it.

Hashem created such a thing as *Gehinnom* – a place where souls have to endure great suffering. Why did Hashem make *Gehinnom*? Doesn't He love us? Why does He have to pain us so much with *Gehinnom*? So that this will force people to regret and confess their sins and resolve never to do it again? Why must there be such thing as *Gehinnom*?

It is because a person took wrongful pleasure from this world, and he never felt pain at this. He remains with the pleasure he had from the sin, and now he must give it back. He has to feel pain equal to the amount of how much he enjoyed.

If two people sinned, and one of them enjoyed himself more than the other one did during the sin, the one who enjoyed himself will have a worse *Gehinnom* than the other one who didn't enjoy it as much. The more evil pleasure one had from this world, the more he needs to undergo *Gehinnom*.

We do not want to be in *Gehinnom*. We want to be forgiven. How can we be forgiven? There are no shortcuts. One has to give back to the Creator what he wrongfully took; the way one reaches this is through enduring physical suffering. The sin was pleasurable to the person, and suffering is the opposite of taking pleasure.

On *Yom Kippur*, there is a *mitzvah* to feel physical affliction. “*And you shall afflict your souls*”. Why? Does Hashem want us to suffer? No. It is because we enjoyed the sin, and for one day of the year, we have the opportunity to give back that wrongful pleasure – by physically suffering on this day, the evil pleasure from sins throughout the rest of the year that seeped into our blood is drawn out, and this is how we are purified.

⁹⁵ *Berachos 35b*

A Day To Disconnect From Physical Pleasure

Now we can understand why there is a concept to be as if we are “dead” on *Yom Kippur*, which we mentioned in the beginning of this chapter.

If a person on his deathbed is offered an ice cream or some other enticement, the average person would refuse it; even if he loves ice cream. He knows he’s about to die, and he realizes at this moment of truth how futile everything on this world is. A person about to die is disconnected from all physical pleasures, and he realizes with certainty that it’s all worthless.

The Vilna Gaon said that the greatest pain one has when he dies is that as he is being escorted to the Heavenly court, he sees all that he could have gained, and all that he has lost. He sees that he took pleasure from all the wrong places, and that he gave up the real pleasure he could have had.

A dead person can be defined as someone who doesn’t feel alive, someone who has no real enjoyment. “A dead person cannot feel anything.”⁹⁶

Thus, if a person wants to prepare himself properly for *Yom Kippur*, he needs to be like someone who is dead – in other words, he needs to return all the wrongful pleasure he had during the year, especially forbidden pleasure. If he is on a higher level, he fulfills the words of *Chazal*: “Sanctify yourself with even what is permissible to you.” But the first thing one must do is to begin by returning the wrongful pleasure he had from his sins. If he spoke *lashon hora* and enjoyed himself while he was at it, if he ate something of a questionable *hechsher* and enjoyed it – he has to return that pleasure.

Someone who is level-headed builds for himself a way of life for the rest of the year in which he will be able to return all the wrongful pleasure.

*“Praiseworthy is the man who is afflicted by Hashem, and who learns from Your Torah.”*⁹⁷ Who is someone that “learns from Your Torah”? This is someone who sits and learns Torah, even though it’s hard for him (for example, when he’s tired); but he understands well that by enduring pain for the Torah, he purifies himself from the evil pleasure he had from sin, and in this way he returns the evil pleasure to Hashem.

Yom Kippur is a day in which a person has no physical enjoyment. Any pleasure one has on this day – for someone who does – is pleasure of the soul. The only physical pleasure one can have on this day is to smell spices, but even this is not really physical pleasure; it is well-known that smell is a sense of the soul, not of the body.

The concept of *Yom Kippur* is, firstly, to disconnect from all physical pleasure. What is left for us to do? We have to fix up what we did wrong this past year; for this we have a *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*, which is to regret the sin, to confess the sin and to resolve never to do the sin again. By regretting the sin, one can erase the evil pleasure which he had, since he now has pain over it.

⁹⁶ *Shabbos 13b*

⁹⁷ *Tebillim 94: 12*

The Pain Must Equal the Pleasure

Now we are able to understand how it can be that a person goes through *Yom Kippur* so many times in his life – expressing regret over their sins, confessing them, and resolving never to do the sin again...yet a person does not feel that his *teshuvah* amounted to anything. Why do people feel this way?

It is because people “regret” their sins only superficially. They make a list of all their committed sins and then express regret over them...although this can go under the category of regret, a person still has to come to a situation in which the amount of pain he has over the sin is equal to the amount of pleasure he had from the sin.

There is a well-known statement of Rav Nachman of Bresslov: “With my *chassidim*, I have succeeded in at least taking away their pleasure from sinning. I can’t stop anyone from sinning, but at least I have helped them get rid of the pleasure they had from it.”

The truth is that *Chazal* state that ever since the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*, a person no longer enjoys committing a sin. Hashem desires that we be able to do *teshuvah* easily, so He made it easier for us by taking away a lot of pleasure from committing a sin.

Thus, the inner point of *teshuvah* for us is to first understand that the problem is not the sin itself we committed, but the connection that we still feel toward it; as *Chazal*⁹⁸ say, “He is attached to it like a dog.” Why does a person feel attached to his sins? It is because since he enjoyed it, he has become attached to it. He has to uproot this connection by regretting it. After that he can have a true *viduy*, because when he remembers his sins as he regrets them, instead of remembering how much he enjoyed it, he feels pain over it. And when he resolves never to commit the sin again, it will be a true commitment. Without true regrets, it is pointless for him to resolve never to do the sin again, and it will be like resolving that he will separate himself from his own foot – a decision that he will of course never carry out.

When a person is still connected to evil, it has become a part of him; if he resolves never to sin again, it will not be enough, since he still feels connected to the sin. What can he do to disconnect from the sin? Just deciding not to sin again will not help, unless he has disconnected from the pleasure of the sin. Only by disconnecting from the pleasure of the sin will it become easier for him to hold onto his resolutions.

If someone is in a place where he is in danger, the best solution is to get out of there! That was what Yosef Hatzaddik did when he was tempted to sin. He ran away from the place. If a person is still connected to evil, to the pleasure of a sin – either he has to run away from the evil, or he must chase out the evil from within him.

This is the deep difference between a righteous person and a wicked person. A righteous person may have committed many sins, but he has truly done *teshuvah* over them – he has separated from the evil enjoyment he had. He doesn’t want to return to that place or ever feel connected to it. But a

⁹⁸ *Sotah 3b*

wicked person is essentially someone who, although he has done *teshuvah*, he still has some “good old memories” from his past...

Purifying Ourselves

This is essentially what it means to become purified on *Yom Kippur* from the “pure waters” sprinkled upon us, which we mentioned in the beginning from the possuk.

When a person gets dirty and sweaty from a long day, he can take a shower that will remove all the dirt from him and make him clean. The same can be said of a person who wants to come and cleanse himself from sin. Although the evil deed has been committed a long time ago, the pleasure from it has remained, and the person is dirtied from it. Just like the body becomes dirtied, so does the soul become dirtied from the pleasure of a sin. By removing the pleasure one had from the sin, the soul becomes cleansed by “pure waters.”

We are taught by *Chazal*⁹⁹ that “A person who sins and [only] confesses and doesn’t return to it, to what is he compared to? To a person who immerses [in a *mikveh*] and is holding a *sheretz* (insect) in his hand; even if he immerses in all of the water in the world, his immersion does not count.” It’s possible that a person goes to the *mikveh* on *Yom Kippur* and immerses himself 310 times, but it can all be worthless! If he never disconnected from the pleasure of the sin, going to the *mikveh* will be ineffective. His soul is still connected to the sin.

This is the secret behind the custom to go to a cold *mikveh* on Erev *Yom Kippur*; to remind us that we need to be “dead” – to disconnect from evil pleasure. Yet even this is not enough. One has to feel personally in his soul that he is “dead”, so to speak. A dying person has no interest in this world’s pleasures, because he knows he is about to leave them eternally.

If a person would give up on this world’s pleasures, he would no longer be interested in them, and he can be confident that he won’t return to those pleasures. He is using the power to be “dead”, in a holy way – like the words of the Rambam, that one has to “kill himself in the tents of Torah.”

It’s possible that a person is sitting all day in the *beis midrash*, yet he’s really living outside of it: someone who only wants pleasures that come from the outside world. Someone who “kills himself in the tents of Torah” means someone who gives up his desires for externalities. This is a Torah that purifies him; this is the *mikveh* that purifies him – when a person erases from himself the pleasures of this world.

⁹⁹ *Yalkut Shimeoni, Mishlei, 961*

Erasing the Connection To Evil

If we understand these words, we are able to understand a lot better how a person can take *Yom Kippur* with him for the rest of the year. On the calendar, *Yom Kippur* is only once a year – but there is a way for a person to always have *Yom Kippur*. How?

Let's say a person, *rachmana litzlon*, falls to an *aveirah*. What should he do? The first thing he needs to know is that he is connected to the evil act, and that is the problem. His job is to uproot that connection, to uproot the desire to do something evil.

It is written, "*On my bed at nights, I sought that which my soul desired.*"¹⁰⁰ Sometimes a person isn't aware of what he wants during the daytime, but at night, he can begin to see what exactly he likes...

One time the Chofetz Chaim had a dream in which he won the lottery and became very rich. When he woke up the next day, he fasted. When his students asked him why he is fasting, he replied that he had a bad dream, and he told them what he had dreamed about. The students asked him that it doesn't say in the *Gemara* that you have to fast over such a dream. The Chofetz Chaim replied, "Either way, it's a bad dream. If it really happens and I do win the lottery, being rich is a test that I don't want to face. And even if the dream isn't true and I never become rich, how did I ever to come to such a dream in the first place? Why am I dreaming about becoming rich?!"

The Chofetz Chaim was scared that his soul is still connected material interests.

Let's say a person lives in a modest apartment with only two and a half rooms, but he really wants to live in a mansion; his desires are to live in a mansion, and that is what his soul is connected to. The fact that he lives in a modest apartment doesn't show his true level, because deep down he wishes to live in luxury; those are his true desires.

A person can be sitting in the *beis midrash*, but he's thinking about Switzerland. His desires are to travel the world – and that is what he really wants in life...

It's possible that a person is sitting at the Shabbos table and giving *mussar* to his children, but deep down in his heart, he wishes that his wife would just serve the next course already...

In other words, a person can *feel* a certain way about something – but his *thoughts* and *words* are saying something else. He is living a life which, on the outside, seems to be quite alright; but if we check out his heart and what he really wants, he is like someone going to the *mikveh* holding a *sheretz*, which is a pointless immersion. When a person still has desires for the pleasures of this world, he won't be able to get purified from *Yom Kippur*.

True Pleasure

¹⁰⁰ Shir HaShirim 3:1

What we are saying is a clear concept. The inner point of life is to derive a vitality from living, to experience true pleasure. On *Rosh HaShanah*, we asked for life – for true life: to enjoy serving Hashem, to enjoy Torah, to enjoy *davening*, to enjoy the *mitzvos*, to enjoy having *emunah*. On *Yom Kippur*, we are now coming to purify ourselves from a false kind of life.

What do we mean by purifying ourselves from a false kind of life? We do not mean only that we must purify our actions. Our actions are only the external layer of what we need to accomplish; although the first thing we need to do is better our actions, this alone will not be enough. Even if a person is *zocheh* to sit and learn all day in the *beis midrash*, and he tries to do all the *mitzvos*, he might still be among those of whom it is said that “*their hearts are far from me.*”

There are people whose hearts are far from Hashem; what does this mean? It means that if we come to a person and ask him what he wants – money or wisdom (just like Hashem came to Shlomo Hamelech and asked him this question), and the person answers, “I want a lot of money, so like this I can sit and learn forever” – such an answer reflects a life of utter falsity.

There is a known story that the late wealthy donor Mr. Reichmann once asked Rav Shach zt”l “Who will have greater *Olam HaBa* – me, for supporting so many *yeshivos*, or the *Rosh Yeshivah?*”, to which Rav Shach replied with a smile,

“I don’t know which of us will have a greater share in *Olam HaBa* – I cannot tell you what will be there, because I was never there. But I can tell you that I am here on this world, and I have a better life on this world than you do. This is because *Chazal* say, “An increase of assets is an increase of worry.” A person who truly sits and learns Torah, however – he is someone who really enjoys life!”

Life is really a true pleasure which Hashem has given us. But just like water can’t be added to a cup filled to the top with soda, so is it impossible for a person to receive the true pleasure when his heart is brimming with all kinds of negative pleasures.

The pleasure of spirituality and Torah cannot enter one’s heart when it is already filled with evil pleasure from sin.

Chazal state that “A person merits Torah if he vomits the milk he nursed from his mother.”¹⁰¹ In other words, a person has to vomit his physical pleasures and in its place enter the spiritual pleasures; this is the *Avodah* of *Yom Kippur*: to vomit all our physical pleasures! We need to erase both our pleasures from sin as well as our pleasures from even permitted desires¹⁰², which attach us to the materialism of this world.

101 *Yalkut Shimeoni, Mishlei, 964*

102 *The author is probably referring to extreme pleasures that are permitted; that although in essence they are permitted, when pursued in an extreme way, pleasures become unhealthy. In “Getting To Know Your Self”, it is explained that while pleasure is a basic and necessary force in our soul, if pleasure is endlessly pursued with no self-restraint, it is clearly extreme and unhealthy.*

To Know What We Want To Take Out of Yom Kippur

When it comes *Motzei Yom Kippur* and a person wants to know if he was purified or not from this *Yom Kippur*, he has to check himself inside. If he feels less of a pull towards worldly pleasures, this is a sign that he became purified on *Yom Kippur*. But if he still feels just as pulled toward materialism after *Yom Kippur* is over as he did before *Yom Kippur*, he is like someone who fell into the *mikveh* without having any intention to be purified by its waters.

The words here are clear and sharp. Before *Yom Kippur*, it is upon us to understand how we must enter it – and how we must leave it.

When a person goes to the supermarket, he goes in with an empty shopping cart and intends to exit the store with a full one. People want to come out with something from *Yom Kippur*, but do they know what indeed they want to take out of it?

If a person lives life in an unclear way, on *Yom Kippur* he will ask for things as well that are unclear. When the end of *Yom Kippur* comes, he will not be clear in what he came out with.

A person has to know before *Yom Kippur* what he truly wants. He shouldn't fool anyone; it is between him and his Creator – he has to know the truth, and to see if he is disconnecting from materialistic pleasures. Understandably, one's human efforts alone will not be enough, and one will need to *daven* to Hashem for help that his heart become purified.

Yet, there is a step that comes before this. In for the heart to become purified, we first need to expel the evil that lurks in it.

The second set of *Luchos* (tablets) was given on *Yom Kippur*, because of the purity inherent on this day. If not for the purity of this day, the *Luchos* wouldn't have been given.

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.

One has to begin ascending the ladder of levels to be on, step by step.

A True Desire for A Spiritual Life

How does a person disconnect from evil? It is very possible that a person wants to disconnect, and he knows that he does bad things and recognizes evil, but he is still attached to the sin like a dog who laps up its own vomit. What can a person do?

Once there was a story with Baba Sali zt”l, who would often host guests in his house; there was a student who humbly said he cannot eat there, because he resolved never to eat anywhere outside his

own house. Baba Sali said to the student that in his house, he is protected by Heaven that no forbidden food ever enters one's mouth there.

How did Baba Sali reach such a level? Of course, he was a *tzaddik* and a very holy person, but it can also be because it is brought in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that if someone truly resolves in his heart that he would rather die rather than eat something forbidden, he is assured that he will be protected by Heaven that he will never stumble.

What Baba Sali reached was an inner kind of protection. When a person is ready to sacrifice himself over the holy Torah and to keep it no matter what, he sanctifies himself a little – and he is sanctified above in Heaven.

Let us take from this the following point. If a person truly wants to disconnect from this world, there is no other way except to fulfill the words of the Sages, “The words of Torah do not exist except in one who kills himself over them.”¹⁰³

The question is: Is a person ready to die for the Torah, or not? If Eliyahu HaNavi would come to a person and reveal to him that if he dies, he will receive the understanding of the whole Torah – what would a person say? If a person isn't ready to die for Torah, it shows that he values his own life more than Torah. If he is ready to die for the Torah, then it shows that Torah to him is more important than his life – because he considers the *Torah* to be life.

When a person realizes that life has no meaning if he is devoid of spirituality, he enters an inner world of purity. But if a person is simply looking for “tips” and “ideas” on how he can get by the *Yom HaDin* and merit a good judgment – then nothing can be done for him!

There is one test a person has to pass, and this says it all: Is one prepared to give up this materialistic lifestyle for a spiritual one? Or does he want to have the best of both worlds...?

We are living today in a world that is full of mixed up values. It used to be very clear to all the difference between a Torah home and a non-Torah based home. People in the past were either pursuing materialism, or spirituality; it was either or. (There were a few *tzaddikim* who were wealthy too and lived like kings – not because they indulged, but because they resembled the wealth of Rebbi, who knew how to live in luxury yet be totally disconnected from it; we cannot learn from this practically, though). But today, when we walk into a Jewish house, we cannot tell clearly if it is a *Kolel* man's house or a working man's house; we cannot tell if he is a wealthy philanthropist or a poverty-stricken individual. Everything looks basically the same. The Torah of today by many people isn't entirely Torah – it is a Torah mixed with other things....

If a person wants to merit that next year should be a true kind of life, he needs to come to a decision, in his soul, that he really wants to be a *ben Torah*; that he really wants to live a life of spirituality.

¹⁰³ *Yalkut Shimeoni*, 762.

Of course one has to eat, drink and clothe himself as usual; but the question is, what does he really want in life? Let's say he wishes deep down that somebody would come and support him for life, and this way he can sit and learn forever, undisturbed; and that this is his true, innermost desire in life. Still, it doesn't show that he's prepared to sacrifice for a spiritual kind of life. If someone would come to him and say, "I will take care of all your physical needs on this world – you just live a life of total spirituality," would he indeed accept this? If the answer is yes, that's excellent; but if a person isn't ready to accept this, then he's obviously not prepared to disconnect from materialism.

It's very easy to say it, but it has to be a resolution that one makes deep inside his soul. Preparing for *Yom Kippur* is essentially a preparation of how to live a life of a soul, without a body. Don't we have a body, though? Yes, we do have a body, but what we mean is that we need to **resolve** in ourselves that we want a kind of life in which we live through our soul.

This will of course be an *Avodah* for us. It is impossible to be perfect in what we are describing here, but it has to be our aspiration. We need to take these words and draw them close to our hearts – that we should understand the goal of life; to understand that our purity can only come from disconnecting from superficial pleasures, and that instead of superficial pleasure, we need inner pleasure to replace it.

May Hashem merit that all of us be signed and sealed for a good year – that our hearts should only yearn for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, to yearn for His Torah, and that we should yearn to serve Him.

3.3 | *Yom Kippur – A Day of Purity*

A Moment of Purity

We are now before the holiest day of the year – *Yom Kippur*.

Yom Kippur is time to become purified, as it is written, “*Before Hashem you shall be purified.*” There is a well-known *Chazal* that Hashem purifies the Jewish people just like a *mikveh* purifies those who are impure.

Let us think a little into this.

The Kotzker Rebbe, may his merit protect us, would say that although usually we find that the rule is “the majority is like the whole”, when it comes to *mikveh*, there is no such concept; either you’re totally in the *mikveh*, or you’re not considered to be in the *mikveh*. If someone is mostly in the *mikveh* but he’s partially outside of it, even a little – he’s not considered to be in the *mikveh*. Why? Because the whole concept of *mikveh* is to be totally in it.

From his words we can compare this to what it means that Hashem purifies us like a *mikveh*. If even one hair on a person’s body is outside the *mikveh*, his immersion doesn’t count. The same can be said with our purification process of *teshuvah*: if we are missing even a little bit of purity from our *teshuvah*, we are missing the entire purity of *Yom Kippur*.

Of course, it is impossible to be perfect. Even if a person really works on himself, no one can become perfect; even Moshe Rabbeinu got angry once and made a mistake. So we do not mean that one has to become perfect; there is no such thing. We are all mere creations, and we are imperfect by definition. What, then, is our mission? How can we “totally be in the *mikveh*”? How can we totally purify all our deeds, *middos* and thoughts? This is simply impossible. If so, what is our mission?

When a person enters the *mikveh*, the purity hasn’t begun yet. It is the moment he exits the *mikveh* that he has become purified. If a person sits in the *mikveh* all day, he’s not in a state of purity yet; it is only when one exits the *mikveh* that the purity starts. This shows us that 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*.

“Before Hashem, Be Purified”

What is that truthful point we are supposed to come to on *Yom Kippur* and take with us for the rest of the year?

Rabbi Akiva said, “Before Whom are you purified, and Who purifies you? Just like a *mikveh* purifies the impure, so does Hashem purify the Jewish people.” What kind of question is this? Do we not know this?

It is describing what it means to be pure. How? We have to reflect into what the special purity on *Yom Kippur* is, more than on any other day of the year. But doesn't *teshuvah* help for the entire year round? What is the special *teshuvah* which we are able to do on *Yom Kippur*? It is because only on *Yom Kippur* are we considered to be “before Hashem.” During the rest of the year, we don't have this.

How exactly on *Yom Kippur* are we “before Hashem”? It is written, “*Their sins separated between them and Hashem your G-d.*”¹⁰⁴ Usually, there is a separation between people and Hashem; on *Yom Kippur*, however, “the essence of the day atones”, and it is a time in which there are no sins, no dividers. We are all like angels, and we wear white. If a person merits to reach the inner point of this day – the point in which one realizes that he is above all sin – for him, there is no separation between him and the Creator, and he can now truly feel Hashem in his heart.

During the rest of the year, a person doesn't feel Hashem in his heart, for two reasons: Either because of his sins, or because he is attached to materialism (which might even be permitted desires; yet we have a *mitzvah* of “*You shall be holy*”, and the Ramban's explanation of this is well-known.¹⁰⁵). On *Yom Kippur*, both of these barriers are removed. Our materialism is removed due to our five forms of physical suffering on this day; when we fast, we are disconnected from materialism. And the barriers caused by our sins are removed as well on this day, because “the essence of the day atones.”

This is the opportunity available on *Yom Kippur*: all barriers are removed, thus we are able to come to truly feel Hashem in our heart. However, just because it is a special time, that doesn't mean

¹⁰⁴ *Yesheiyahu* 59: 2

¹⁰⁵ See Ramban, *Vayikra* 19: 2, who discusses that the *mitzvah* of “*You shall be holy*” refers to how we must sanctify even our permitted desires.

that people can automatically utilize it. Shabbos and the other *Yomim Tovim* are also special times, yet people don't necessarily utilize those times.

There is a concept that the time itself is an opportunity to receive spiritual growth. But it doesn't work unless we access it. The special time can only affect us if we draw the matter close to ourselves. Otherwise, a person can go a whole Shabbos or Yom Tov without feeling a thing. It's possible that a person goes by *Yom Kippur* and doesn't feel anything, in spite of the fact that "the essence of the day atones." So although it is a special time, we have to go ahead and actually tap into its power; it's not automatic.

A Day of No Barriers

The fasting and atonement of our sins on *Yom Kippur* are not a goal unto itself. They are just a **tool**, to help us recognize the Creator, in our **hearts**.

"*Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned.*" Why are we asking for forgiveness? There is no obligation to ask forgiveness; we are obligated to regret our sins, to confess them, and to resolve never to do them again – but there is no *mitzvah* to ask Hashem to forgive us! Why, then, do we ask Hashem to forgive us? It is because Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* that besides for begin forgiven, we also want to find favor in Hashem's eyes. A person might be forgiven for his wrongs, but that doesn't mean that he has gotten his favor back in the eyes of the one he wronged. We don't just want to be forgiven for the sin - we also want to win Hashem's favor back.

The depth of this is that when we ask to be forgiven, we are not just doing it to be saved from suffering, in this world or in the next world. We know that there is a higher purpose to Creation than this. A person might go his whole life and never commit one sin, but he can still be very far from fulfilling the purpose of Creation. Hashem created the world so that His creations can come close to Him. Sins prevent this, and so does an attachment to materialism in general. But even if a person hasn't sinned or isn't stuck to materialism, he can still have a problem in that he is just living his life in a very routine way, and he will never search for the Creator in his life.

Fasting and asking Hashem for forgiveness is just a means to help a person reach the inner point of *Yom Kippur*, which is: "*Before Hashem, be purified.*" In others words: we need **to reach a palpable recognition in our heart, of Hashem**.

How can a person reach it? Don't our sins and attachment to materialism hold us back? Normally, they do. For this reason, Hashem gives us one day a year in which nothing holds us back.

Chazal state that *Yom Kippur* is "the day of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*." What does this mean? Are there days that aren't a "day of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*"?! Don't we serve Hashem every day? What it means is that it is the day of the year in which a person can feel Hashem in his life, by very nature of this day. It is a "day of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*" **for us**. During the rest of the year, sins and the pull towards materialism act as a barrier between the person and Hashem, preventing him from becoming closer to Him. Even if he fasts, he still has his sins. *Yom Kippur*, though, is day which

Hashem has given us that has no sins and no pull towards materialism. It is a “day of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*” – a day in which a person must come to truly feel Hashem’s existence, in his heart.

This does not mean that a person cannot attain this during the rest of the year as well, but the day of *Yom Kippur* provides a person with a special opportunity to have this.

Asking Forgiveness – A Tool, Not A Goal

Every person prepares himself for the holy day of *Yom Kippur*. A person accepts upon himself to regret his sins, to confess them, and to resolve never to commit them again; each person according to how much he feels he is capable of doing. But why are we asking Hashem for forgiveness?

A superficial person, as he says the words “*Zochreinu l’chaim tovim*” (Remember us for a good life), is already thinking about “*Chosmeinu b’sefer chaim tovim*” (Seal us in the book of life) – that he be written in the “*sefer parnassah v’chalkalah*” (the book of livelihood and support); he’s just thinking that he wants to have a good and sweet year. He realizes that his sins will get in the way of this, so he asks Hashem for forgiveness.

This is not the true perspective to have, though. Rather, it is that Hashem gave us one day a year in which we can feel Hashem in our heart, and from that we can come to understand what our mission is during the rest of the year.

“Taste it and see, that Hashem is good.” The *Mesillas Yesharim* states that one must reach a level of closeness to Hashem in which he is pulled after him like one magnet to another. But when a person doesn’t “taste” or “see” Hashem’s existence, it is very unlikely that he will be pulled after Hashem like a magnet. He doesn’t feel close to Hashem; he simply believes that it’s possible. But this alone will not suffice. Who among us can feel what we believe? It is not enough just to believe. There are some rare individuals who are able to survive just on belief alone in Hashem without feeling Him, but most people need to feel Hashem in order to survive. If they just believe in Hashem and don’t feel Him, they are less likely to act upon their beliefs; we need to feel Hashem, and it is not enough just to believe in Him.

Hashem gave us one day a year in which He removes all barriers so we can feel Him. Thus, the first preparation one needs to make for *Yom Kippur* is that the five forms of physical suffering on this day are to fulfill the mitzvah of teshuvah (which includes regretting the sin, confessing the sin, and resolving not to do the sin again) – but that the purpose of all these mitzvos is to come to feel the existence of Hashem!

A person awaits the spiritual light of *Yom Kippur*. What is the spiritual light that a person should want to take with him from *Yom Kippur*? If a person is just looking forward to his sins being forgiven, maybe his sins will be forgiven, but as Rabbeinu Yonah writes, he has lost the whole purpose of the day; he forgot to search for Hashem. Even if a person *davens* from the depths of his heart and cries to Hashem that his sins be forgiven – and Hashem answers him and indeed forgives him – now what? What is the point of this?

A person has to know what the purpose of *Yom Kippur* is – to ask for forgiveness, and to ask that he draw close to the goal of all this. A person has to know that sins and an attachment to materialism are what hold him back from feeling Hashem; to remove our sins and our attachment to materialism is just one aspect of *Yom Kippur*, but it is not yet the essence of *Yom Kippur*.

Only on *Yom Kippur* one is purified “before Hashem.” If the purpose would be that we just become purified from sin, it wouldn’t have anything to do with “before Hashem.” Being purified on *Yom Kippur* is not the regular kind of purity that we understand from learning the laws of purity and impurity. It is a purity of being “before Hashem”, and it is not just about becoming pure. It is a purity so that we can come to remove the barriers that hold us back from being close to Hashem – and when we remove those barriers, one can come to truly recognize the reality of Hashem in his heart.

All of Life Is One Piece

What we are discussing here is not just an issue of how to look at *Yom Kippur*. It is an issue of how a person looks at everything in the world before him.

A person might live *Yiddishkeit* very superficially and view everything he does as random acts: we learn Torah, we do the *mitzvos*, we *daven*...and then we also have to go through a *Yom Kippur*, which is day to ask Hashem to be forgiven for our sins. With this perspective, one doesn’t see any connection between all the *mitzvos* of life. He doesn’t see how it all relates automatically to his connection he has with the Torah. If he’s a little bit of a thinker, maybe he realizes that he needs his sins to be forgiven so he can learn Torah better, but beyond that, he doesn’t see the connection.

The truth, though, is that all of life is “one piece” (*miksheh achas*) – just like how the Menorah was entirely made from a *miksheh achas*, from one piece.

We need Hashem revealed in our life, though, to show us how all of life is all one piece.

The Torah Can Only Be Received After Being Purified from Yom Kippur

When Moshe came back down with the second set of *Luchos*, it was the day after *Yom Kippur* – after the Jewish people were forgiven and purified. This was not by chance. After the sin with the Golden Calf, the Torah could not be given to the people unless they were to be purified.

Why did it have to be this way, though? Do sins contradict the Torah so much? Don’t we know that a person can learn Torah all day and even produce *sefarim* with wonderful *chiddushei Torah* of his, yet this doesn’t mean that he doesn’t speak *lashon hora* or commit other sins? It seems that sins are not such a contradiction to Torah learning. Why, then, did the *Luchos* have to wait until after *Yom Kippur*? Why did they need *Yom Kippur* to receive the Torah?

The answer to this is, that it's very possible that a person is connected to the superficial layer of Torah, but as for the true reality of Torah, the kind of Torah that is "one piece", this does not exist by a person who hasn't yet revealed Hashem in his heart. That is why it was only after *Yom Kippur* that we could receive the Torah, after we were purified and forgiven.

When a person sees how all of life is really one unit, when he sees how all of the Torah is really one piece, a tool that can reveal the One Creator of the world in his heart – such a person, when he comes to *Yom Kippur*, realizes that the whole idea of *Yom Kippur* is for this purpose. He sees how the five forms of physical affliction on this day are essentially a tool to remove the barriers that hold a person back from revealing Hashem in the heart.

But if a person views Torah as a goal unto itself, a Torah that doesn't necessarily involve the revelation of Hashem's in one's personal life – then he views the *Yomim Tovim* with the same attitude: it's all just happenstance to him. To him, *Rosh Hashanah* is nothing more than a day of judgment; *Yom Kippur* to him is a day to have his sins forgiven, and Succos is a time of happiness. He doesn't see a connection between any of the *Yomim Tovim*.

However, when a person lives with the recognition that the purpose of his life is to reveal Hashem in the heart, then he can view *Rosh Hashanah* as a tool to get to this purpose, and he sees *Yom Kippur* as another tool to get there. These times of the year can all be seen as tools of how to reveal Hashem more in the heart. A person can only come to this recognition when he views all of life as a means which bring him to a greater goal: to reveal Hashem.

The Proper Way To Prepare

Everything needs preparation. What preparation is required for the *Yomim Noraim*? First, one needs to acquire for himself the proper attitude, he has to know towards where he is aspiring to: "*Sof maaseh, b'machshavah techilah*" – "The end of actions, is first with thought."

What exactly should a person want to take out of *Yom Kippur*?

In order to answer this question, one has to answer a question that comes far before this. It should not be a question of what I want to take out of *Yom Kippur*, but a question of what I must take out of the 1st day of Elul, the 15th day of Elul, the 4th of Tishrei, the 5th of Tishrei. What does a person want then?

If a person wants a certain thing in life on the 5th or 6th of Tishrei, and then it comes *Yom Kippur* and he wants something else, he is attempting to reach a level where he isn't yet at, and he might have a fallout from all of this, *chas v'shalom*. When a person tries jumping to a level which he isn't at, he is not actually there, and if he isn't there, then it is not his true level. Even if he jumps to it, he will soon fall from there.

Thus, we cannot look at *Yom Kippur* as a day that is separate from the rest of the year, and to attempt to live it during the rest of the year. What we must understand is that all of life, including *Yom Kippur*, is all a means to reveal Hashem in the heart.

Why Do We Wait For Moshiach?

One of the thirteen principles of our faith is that we must wait for *Moshiach* every day. Yet, it's possible a person is waiting for *Moshiach* – but not for Hashem! Who - and what - is *Moshiach*? When *Moshiach* comes, the world will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem.¹⁰⁶ *Moshiach* will come to reveal Hashem onto the world.

Why are we commanded to wait for *Moshiach* every day? So that he can redeem us from our suffering? So that he can give us all health and livelihood? This is not the point of *Moshiach*. For this, we wouldn't need *Moshiach* – we could have any miracle worker come and solve all the problems for us. The concept of *Moshiach* is that he will come to reveal Hashem in the hearts of people. This is why we await for him to come – we are awaiting that inner light to become revealed.

When a person wishes he could have Hashem's reality revealed to him in his heart, even if he has sinned during the year or is pulled towards materialism in general, he will be able to utilize *Yom Kippur* and reach this aspiration. The day of *Yom Kippur* can elevate a person to a higher level he isn't normally on. But in order to receive that higher level, a person needs to indeed yearn for this. If a person has a longing for something, he will be able to receive what it has to offer him, but if this aspiration isn't present, he won't reach the high levels.

The relationship between the Creator and the Jewish people is compared to that of a bride and a groom. A person only has this intense relationship with Hashem if he longs for it – meaning, if he lives the rest of the year with Hashem. **If he doesn't live with Hashem during the year, he should at least long for the relationship. If he has that longing, he will be able to gain from what *Yom Kippur* has to offer** – and even though he normally isn't on such a high level, the day of *Yom Kippur* can elevate him to indeed feel Hashem in his heart.

The purpose of Creation is so that we become close to Hashem. Hashem took us out of Egypt, He gave us the Torah – but He was only revealed to us for this short amount of time, because we still hadn't reached our purpose. Our purpose was reached with the building of the *Beis Hamikdash*, when Hashem said, “*And I will dwell amongst them.*” Each person is supposed to come to have Hashem's presence dwell in his own heart. The purpose of everything is that Hashem should be felt in each person's heart.

When a person reaches with clarity, that this is the ultimate purpose of life - even if he knows he hasn't reached it, at least he should yearn for it - he can long for *Rosh Hashanah* because it is a day in which he can search for how to become closer to Hashem, and he longs for *Yom Kippur* because it is a day in which he can become close to Hashem.

¹⁰⁶ See *Yeshayahu* 11:9

It is not only during *Yomim Noraim* that a person can become close to Hashem. A person can search for closeness to Hashem even if it is the second day of Tishrei, the second day of Cheshvan, or the second day of Kislev. What, then, is special about the *Yomim Noraim*? These are special times in which a person can reach closeness to Hashem even if he isn't on such a high level – as long as he aspires for this and longs for this.

“*You have chosen us from all the nations, You loved us and desired us...*” These words of the *Shemoneh Esrei* we *daven* on Yom Tov mean that these days are really a spiritual level that is above us, but since Hashem loves us so much, He reveals Himself to us through Yom Tov. Yom Tov is called “*moed*”, which comes from the word “*vaad*” – a “meeting.” Yom Tov is a meeting between the Jewish people and their Father in Heaven.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur Show Us What Life Is All About

We need a clear way to live life, and it shouldn't be limited just to *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. We all know that these days of *Yomim Noraim* will come and go, and then we will go back to our routine life. What then? There will be no more lectures for *Yom Kippur*. What will we do then?

If one really knows what life is about, then *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* to him is the backbone for the rest of the year. These days are supposed to give us the true meaning of our entire life: to understand that Hashem created a world with one goal, a goal that applies even more specifically to the Jewish people: that “we all believe in our G-d and thank Him that He created us, for we have other reason in being created; the Almighty Above has no desire in this world at all except that a person should know and thank his G-d, Who created him.”¹⁰⁷

Even if a person knows the purpose of why he was created, how often does he think about it? These words to him might just be something he sees printed in a *Chumash*, but he doesn't actualize it in his daily life.

Preparing for *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* is really about understanding what life is about. It is to understand that Hashem gave us these ten days so that we can realize, that even if we fall to sin during the rest of the year and we have lost sight of our goal, we are given a new year as a new opportunity, to open a fresh new page in our life.

What would we want written in that new page we are turning for ourselves? That we should be forgiven?? If that is where our aspirations end, then when it comes next year as well we will need to once again be “forgiven”...

If we are writing for ourselves new piece of paper, we should want that it should say on it the *posuk*: “*And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good.*” How, indeed, do we become close to Hashem?

¹⁰⁷ Ramban, in the end of *Parshas Bo*.

Through Torah, through *mitzvos*, through remembering Him constantly, and through simply talking to Him every day, as a person talks to his friend.¹⁰⁸

The Depth of Our Tefillos on Yom Kippur

The power of *Yom Kippur* is that it can give a person the ability to change his whole orientation about life. Let us reflect into this.

We are used to thinking differently than what has been said here – and in fact, we never think at all about it. But the power of *Yom Kippur* is that it can enable us to have our hearts and minds be purified by Hashem. We are able to purify our hearts that we shouldn't want anything else other than Torah and *avodas Hashem*; we are able to purify our minds that it should understand what the depth of life is all about.

What should a person mainly *daven* for on *Yom Kippur*? That his sins be forgiven? No. Although that is what it seems to imply from our *davening*, there is more depth to what we saying in the *davening*.

Let us compare this to the following. A person who hasn't learned *Gemara* for years and went to work now opens a *Gemara* and starts to learn it. He doesn't see any logic in it; the *Gemara* makes no sense to him. If you tell him that there have been hundreds of pages full of writings about the line of *Gemara* in front of him, he wouldn't believe you. But we all know that there is depth within depth contained in the words of the *Gemara*; if someone doesn't understand the *Gemara*. It's simply because he's unlearned.

The same goes for the *tefillos* of *Yomim Noraim*. The fact that we ask for forgiveness is really a deep matter, and it requires a lot of in-depth analysis. It is just that we are used to reading it off like when we say *Tehillim*. Even those who have *kavanah* when they say the *tefillos* are only thinking about the simple, basic understanding of the words. But the truth is that these *tefillos* are just as deep as any *Gemara*. They need to be learned and understood, with depth.

So the first thing one must understand about *Yom Kippur* is, that the point of this day is not about asking for forgiveness. Asking for forgiveness is only a tool to help us reach closeness to Hashem, because it removes the barriers holding us back from this.

The Practical Way To Prepare for Yom Kippur

Let us think in a very practical way how we can prepare for the holy day of *Yom Kippur*.

Firstly, we need to clearly understand what the general purpose of life is. Then, we can come to understand what the purpose of the day of *Yom Kippur* is.

¹⁰⁸ As the Chazon Ish wrote.

After one has clarified what the purpose of *Yom Kippur* is, and he is also aware of what holds him back from reaching this purpose – he can then ask from Hashem the following: “Hashem, please remove from me all barriers, and reveal to me the inner point of it all. Reveal to me the Torah, which came down on *Yom Kippur*, the Torah which is clean from sin; the Torah which will enable me to cleave to You.”

In other words: Know what the purpose of *Yom Kippur* is, what the tools are which bring about this purpose, and *daven* that you receive those tools.

On *Yom Kippur*, a person has a lot of time to talk to Hashem. One can lengthen his *Shemoneh Esrei* on *Yom Kippur* and talk more to Hashem. On Rosh Hashanah, this is harder to do, because a person has to be able to hear the *shofar*. But on *Yom Kippur*, one is free to spend much more time in *Shemoneh Esrei* and speak with Hashem. It is one day of the year in which we have permission to speak freely to Hashem, all day. And what should we ask Hashem for?

“*Ribono shel olam*. First and foremost, purify my mind, that I should understand what the purpose of life is. Open up my heart to Your Torah. Which kind of Torah? The kind of Torah that brings me close to You, the Torah which came on *Yom Kippur*, the Torah that is free from sin, the Torah of which there are no barriers holding me back; that I should merit to truly be close to You.”

There Is Always One Goal

Even if we would be before Chanukah, Purim, Pesach, or Shavuot, the words here still remain unchanged, just as the air we breathe which always stays the same. For something which sustains us always stays the same - it never changes.

But if a person can't breathe through his nose, he needs to be put on intravenous to help him breathe. The same can be said of our *avodas Hashem* throughout the whole year: we always have one goal, we always “breathe the same air.” Hashem gives us each *Yom Tov* so that we can have different ways how we can breathe that same air – there are many ways to become sick in the spiritual sense, and the cure is always to become close to Hashem. That is the air which we must always breathe, and there are many ways – many *Yomim Tovim* – how we can “breathe” this air.

Every *Yom Tov* which we have, was given us to by Hashem to get to one purpose alone: to feel in our heart how Hashem exists. If we absorb these words, the next year will be a totally different year. We will be clear from the beginning of the year until its end, about what we are searching for, and what we want, and what holds us back, and the tools we can use to reach our goal.

As mentioned, there are altogether three things that hold us back: being attached to materialism, sins, and acting monotonously. We have several tools we will need to help us get to our goal (closeness to Hashem), and they are: Torah, *mitzvos*, *tefillah*, and *emunah*. All of these things need to be done with the intention to get to our goal – to become connected to Hashem, every day.

3.4 | *Returning To Your Inner Purity*¹⁰⁹

Entering The “Kodesh Kodashim” Within Our Own Soul

“For on this day, you shall be atoned, before Hashem, you shall be purified.” On the holy day of Yom Kippur, there is a special spiritual light on this day that allows us to attain *taharah* – purity. The purity does not begin on Yom Kippur, but in the ten days of repentance that precede it.

When the *Beis HaMikdash*¹¹⁰ existed, Yom Kippur was the one time of the year where the *Kohen Gadol* would enter *lifnay v’lifnim*, “before Me, and inside”, into the *Kodesh Kodashim*¹¹¹ and do the *avodah*¹¹² there, where he would sprinkle the blood of the *korbonos*¹¹³.

Now that we do not have a *Beis HaMikdash*, nor do we have the *korbonos* or the *Kohen Gadol* to do the *avodah*, the main *avodah* of Yom Kippur, which would purify and atone for us, is missing. But although we no longer have the *korbonos* and the *Kohen Gadol* to enter the *Kodesh Kodashim* to atone for us, we are taught that in our own soul, we can enter the “*Kodesh Kodashim*” that is within¹¹⁴ and do *avodah* there, resembling the *Kohen Gadol*’s *avodah* in the *Kodesh Kodashim*.

This is because there is a rule that everything in Creation is found on three planes – in the world, in time, and in the soul.¹¹⁵ Just as there was a *Kodesh Kodashim* in a place in the world – in the place that was the *Beis HaMikdash* – so does the *Kodesh Kodashim* exist in the dimension of our soul.

How, indeed, can a person enter “before Hashem”, *lifnay v’lifnim*, into his own personal *Kodesh Kodashim*?

Entering Our Heart

The sefer *Nefesh HaChaim* explains that our **heart** is our own personal *Kodesh Kodashim*. Just as the *Kohen Gadol* was not allowed to entertain any improper thoughts when he stood in the *Kodesh Kodashim*, so is a person forbidden to have any forbidden thoughts, for his heart is the *Kodesh Kodashim*.

109 <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/yom-kippur-026-returning-your-inner-purity>

110 Temple

111 the holy of Holies; the innermost chamber in the *Beis HaMikdash* that contains the Ark, which contained G-d’s direct presence; it was only allowed to be accessed by the *Kohen Gadol*, on Yom Kippur.

112 Temple service

113 offerings

114 *Nefesh HaChaim*, *shaar aleph*

115 *Sefer Yetzirah*, III

The heart is called the “*Beis Kodshei Kodashim*”, and entering the innermost point of our heart is essentially where we enter the “*Kodesh Kodashim*” that is within ourselves – where each man does his own personal “*avodah*”, which is a resemblance of the *Kohen Gadol’s avodah* in the *Kodesh Kodashim*.

Thus, the words “*Be purified, before Hashem*”, which is about Yom Kippur, is essentially referring to this concept of entering the innermost point of the heart; we are “purified before Hashem” when we enter deep into our heart on Yom Kippur.

The Difference Between Our Avodah on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur

Rosh HaShanah is called “*Yom Teruah*” (day of the *teruah* sound of the *shofar*), and “*teruah*” is from the word *hisorerus*, “awakening”. We are awakened on Rosh HaShanah, through the blast of the *shofar*, which can inspire us to the point that we will want to enter into our heart.

Rosh HaShanah is where we begin our purification process from all previous *tum’ah* (spiritual impurity or contamination) that has descended upon us from the rest of the year. Just as a corpse has a status of *tum’ah*, and just as a sleeping person has a degree of *tum’ah* (for sleep is a “sixtieth of death”) where he must wash his hands in order to remove he *tum’ah*, so too on Rosh HaShanah, we can come to purify ourselves from the all the *tum’ah* upon us, through being awakened by the blast of the *shofar*. The *shofar’s* sound awakens us to enter our innermost self, which enables us to begin purifying ourselves from all previous *tum’ah*.

That is all just the first day of *Aseres Y’mei Teshuvah* (the ten days of repentance, which begin with Rosh HaShanah), which is the beginning of the purification process. The final day of *Aseres Y’mei Teshuvah*, however, which is Yom Kippur, is a far deeper level than the awakening of Rosh HaShanah.

From a superficial perspective, Yom Kippur also seems to be like purification process from our previous impurities. After all, the *Kohen Gadol* had to keep immersing himself in the *mikveh* each time after changing his garments, and we also immerse ourselves in a *mikveh* in order to enter Yom Kippur.

But this is just the external aspect of the purity of Yom Kippur. The inner aspect of our *avodah* on Yom Kippur is not just to awaken ourselves so that we can purify ourselves from all previous impurity. It is to enter inward into ourselves, into our very heart – to the place that is “*lifnay v’lifnim*”.

In that place of the heart, we reach our *neshamah tehorah* (pure soul) that Hashem has placed in us, which we speak of every morning in the blessing of “*Elokai Neshamah*”. The *neshamah* is found in the deepest part of our heart, and it always remains pure.

On Yom Kippur, where are purified before Hashem, the meaning of our *avodah* is not to leave our previous state of *tum’ah* and to become *tahor* from this *tum’ah*. Rather, our *avodah* on Yom

Kippur is to reach the inherent *taharah* that is deep within our heart – the “*neshamah tehorah*” in us, which always stays pure.

Yom Kippur – Returning To Our Soul’s Eternal Purity

Our actual *avodah* to purify ourselves begins in the Ten Days of Repentance, where we leave *tum’ah* and enter into *taharah*, to be purified from the *tu’mah* on us. But this is just the beginning of our *avodah*. Our *avodah* ends on Yom Kippur, where we enter into our innermost depths, where all is pure.

Just as the *Kohen Gadol* enters the holiest and purest place on Yom Kippur, so does each person have the *avodah* to enter into the pure place, in himself on Yom Kippur.

The *Mishnah* in *Yoma* says that “Words of Torah are not susceptible to *tu’mah*.” Entering the deepest part of our soul means to enter a place in ourselves that resembles “words of Torah are not susceptible to *tu’mah*”; this is a deeper kind of purity than merely becoming *tahor* from previous *tum’ah*. It is to enter a point of purity in ourselves which can never become impure in the first place – and that is the meaning of the “*neshamah tehorah*” that is deep within us. The *avodah* we have on Yom Kippur is to enter this place in ourselves, where we connect to Hashem in a place that is entirely pure.

This is the meaning of the statement, “Hashem is pure, and His servants are pure.” Obviously Hashem is always pure, so what does this statement mean? It is referring the point of purity where our soul is connected with Hashem in complete purity, where it is attached to the Source that it was carved from. Of this, it is said “*Before Hashem, you shall be purified.*”

The Depth of the Atonement and Purity On Yom Kippur

The Torah writes of Yom Kippur: “*For on this day you shall be atoned, and before Hashem, you shall be purified.*” Yom Kippur thus has two aspects: *kaparah* (atonement) and *taharah* (purity.)

The first aspect, *kaparah* \ atonement, is the external part of the purification process, and this is where we are purified from previous impurities. But the inner part of the purification is *taharah*: “*Before Hashem you shall be purified*”, where the depth of our pure soul is revealed – a part of ourselves that can never become impure in the first place, for it is always pure. It is from that place in our soul that we merit the *selichah* (forgiveness) from Hashem.

Thus, the beginning of our *avodah* on Yom Kippur is to first purify ourselves from any previous impurities, and then we need to attempt to reach the deeper point in the soul that is always pure to begin with.

Beyond Inspiration

Initially, a person lives a “body” kind of life. As one matures, he gains inspiration in his life, where he can go beyond a “body” kind of existence. Inspiration is essentially the essence of Rosh HaShanah, and as we have explained, inspiration is not yet the end of our goal.

The “Yom Kippur” of most people today is being experienced on a level of Rosh HaShanah – it is being experienced as inspiration. But if a person can go beyond the inspiration he feels on Yom Kippur, he enters inward into his soul, into the deepest chamber in himself.

The Pure Point In The Soul: The Point of “Alone”

When the *Kohen Gadol* entered the *Kodesh Kodashim*, he was alone. There was no one else with him, except for Hashem, and the Torah [which was in the *Aron*]. No one else was allowed to be there; he was “alone” and separate from the world.

If the *Kohen Gadol* entered the *Kodesh Kodashim* and he was not purified enough, he died on the spot as soon as he entered there. This happened often in the era of the second *Beis HaMikdash*, where the *Kohen Gadol* was not always righteous, and he got the position due to his wealth and status. When he entered the *Kodesh Kodashim* on Yom Kippur, he was instantly killed.

On a deeper level, this can be understood as follows: since the *Kohen Gadol* did not reach *taharah* – or the level of “*neshamah tehorah*” in himself - the exact opposite of *taharah* was instead revealed there in the *Kodesh Kodashim*: death, which is the epitome of all *tu'mah* (spiritual contamination). But if a *Kohen Gadol* was indeed purified inwardly, he would enter the *Kodesh Kodashim* safely, and he was alone there with Hashem and His Torah.

The inner place of our soul, our *neshamah tehorah*, is the “individual” aspect of man, apart from the rest of the world, where one is completely “alone” with Hashem.

When a person is around others, it is possible for him to receive the *tum'ah* of this world. The *taharah* found deep in the soul, our *neshamah tehorah*, is only active when we are separate from others and we are alone with Hashem. The Sages said, “Therefore, man was created individual.” Connecting to our deepest point of the soul, our “individual” point, is the only place where we can be apart from others’ influences, and instead be completely alone with Hashem.

At first, we need to connect with others who serve Hashem; we have a *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael* (love for the Jewish people) and eventually we must also reveal a love for all of Creation. But when we enter the deepest point in ourselves, we must be alone from others.

This does not mean that we become uncaring towards others when we are in that isolated part of ourselves; we see that the *Kohen Gadol* would *daven* for *Klal Yisrael* upon leaving the *Kodesh Kodashim*. But this was only upon leaving the *Kodesh Kodashim*. When he was actually inside the *Kodesh Kodashim*, he felt separate from others and he was utterly alone with Hashem.

As long as a person lives a “body” kind of life, he cannot go beyond the social aspect of his life; he has no place where he is ever “alone”. Even if he gains inspiration from Rosh HaShanah, he remains with just the *teruah* of the *shofar*, the awakening of the *shofar*; the word *teruah* is also from the word *rei’us*, friendship – which hints to us that the level of “Yom Teruah” that is Rosh HaShanah cannot elevate a person beyond the level of inspiration and of friendship with others. It doesn’t bring a person to the state of “alone” that he must ultimately acquire.

Only the level of Yom Kippur enables a person to enter the deep place in his soul, where he is alone from all others and where he is alone with Hashem.

The *Chovos HaLevovos* says that a *chassid* (pious individual) can be among people yet he is living alone from them. How is this possible? It is because a person can enter inward into his soul, into this place of “alone”.

Our Avodah During Tefillas Ne’ilah: Entering The “Alone”

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*" 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.

Summary Of Our Avodah On Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur is a special time granted to us where we can attempt to reach deeper into ourselves. We have explained that the first part of our *avodah* is to become inspired to the point that we are purified from any previous impurities, and that the deeper and more important part of our *avodah* is to get in touch with our inner point of purity that is unchanging; our *neshamah tehorah*.

The Gemara says that there were two groups of people who would sing [at the *Simchas Beis HaShoeivah*]: "Praiseworthy is the one who has never sinned. One who has sinned, should bring a *korbon*, do *teshuvah*, and he is atoned."¹¹⁶ These two levels exist as well in our soul: there is the point of being purified from sin, and there is a more inner point, in which there is no sin at all, for it always remains pure. The outer layer of the soul represents those who have become purified from sin through doing *teshuvah*, and the inner layer of the soul is reminiscent of the *tzaddikim* who have never sinned in the first place.

In the deep point of our soul, there is no possibility of sin, and it is forever pure. This point can be reached especially on Yom Kippur.

Returning To Our Purity Throughout The Year

In Kelm, they would practice self-introspection for every ten days following Yom Kippur. This was called "*Asiri Kodesh*". They would examine themselves and see if they were still keeping to their

¹¹⁶ *Sukkah 53a*

resolutions they had made on Yom Kippur. The *Sefer Chareidim* says to do this once a week; in Kelm it was every ten days. If we want our Yom Kippur to have a lasting effect on us, we will also need some kind of practice that resembles the *Asiri Kodesh* of Kelm.

Practically speaking, each person needs to set aside some time throughout the year, on a regular basis, for self-introspection, where he should see if he is still resembling his level on Yom Kippur or not. Obviously, we cannot totally resemble the level that we were on Yom Kippur when it is during the rest of the year, but we can at least see if our lives are somewhat in resemblance of how we were on Yom Kippur.

One should try to do this for at least once every ten days, and take a few minutes to try to enter the deepest part of his soul, as much as he can; and he should then speak to Hashem from that deep place in himself that he reaches.

This deep place of our soul, also known as the innermost point of the heart, is essentially our source of vitality in life. This is the meaning of the verse, “*For with you there is the source of life, in Your light there can be seen light*” as well as the verse, “*From all that you guard, guard your heart, for from it flows all life.*” This deep point of the heart is where our entire spiritual vitality flows from and it makes us feel alive.

If one comes into Yom Kippur having been in touch with this place in himself during the rest of the year (such as by practicing this *hisbodedus* every ten days), he can then call out to Hashem from the very depths of himself when it comes Yom Kippur: “*From the depths, I call out to You, Hashem.*”

Ne'ilah: The Time To Enter Into Our Purest Point

Throughout all of the generations, the world was always filled with *tum'ah* (spiritual impurity). But we have been taught by our Sages that in “*ikvesa d'meshicha*” (the “footsteps in Mashiach”), the world will be at the “50th gate of impurity”, the most depraved spiritual state possible. The world has fallen to the worst level of *tum'ah* and it continues to descend further into it.

The Sages said that there are 49 ways to render something *tahor* (spiritually pure) as well as 49 ways to render it *tamei* (impure). On Yom Kippur, we can leave *tum'ah* and become *tahor* from all previous *tum'ah*, which include all 49 levels of *tum'ah*. But when we live in the *ikvesa d'meshicha*, where the world is found in the “50th gate of impurity”, in order for us to leave such a *tum'ah*, we will need a much deeper level of *taharah* on Yom Kippur.

We cannot just live our life as usual nowadays and suddenly change on Yom Kippur. If the world today is found today beyond the 49th level of *tum'ah*, that means that in order to be purified before Hashem, we must leave the 49 levels of *tum'ah* that surround us from all sides. We cannot leave such a *tum'ah* just with the power of *Ne'ilah* alone – we will need to really “close the doors” by *Ne'ilah* and enter into our “*neshamah tehorah*” there, and only then can we be ensured spiritual survival today.

When the world is found in the “50th level of *tum’ah*”, the only way we can escape it is through the light of the *neshamah tehorah* that is found in the deepest part of ourselves. Our *neshamah tehorah* can purify us even if we if we have become infected (and we definitely *have* become infected) by the “50th gate of *tum’ah*” that surrounds us.

We can keep returning to the pure place in ourselves that does not become susceptible to any *tum’ah*, in the same sense that “words of Torah do not become susceptible to *tum’ah*”. There, we go back to our closeness with Hashem, to the point in the soul which can never become impure to begin with.

This connection to purity is what can protect us during the rest of the year, and the root of it begins on Yom Kippur [with *Ne’ilah*]. It is the point in ourselves which is closed off from the rest of the world, where one is in his “individual” point, utterly alone, where there is only Hashem and Torah. On a deeper note, one is connected in that place to the root of all souls of *Klal Yisrael* (and we emphasize the “root” here, but not the “branches”, for the “branches” are currently found in the 50th gate of impurity).

In Conclusion

May Hashem give us the strength, through the light of purity that comes down onto the world on Yom Kippur, that we not only become purified from all previous impurities that have come upon us, but that we return to the place in ourselves that was pure along, the deepest point in our soul which is forever pure, like the “words Torah which can never become susceptible to *tum’ah*”.

Through reaching our own point of purity in the soul, may it be revealed a world which is entirely pure, the greatest level of existence possible, where all will be pure, and all the people in the world, young and old, will clearly recognize, their Creator..¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ See also *Tefillah #086 – The Purity Within*

3.5 | *Yom Kippur: Teshuvah and Beyond*¹¹⁸

Yom Kippur – The Root of Teshuvah, and Beyond Teshuvah

The Ten Days of Repentance are a time of *teshuvah* for all, and it concludes with the tenth day, Yom Kippur, the holiest day of all of them – which is hinted to in the verse, “*And the tenth shall be holy*” - the root of all repentance.

But there is a rule that every concept contains its opposite as well. Therefore, if Yom Kippur is the root of *teshuvah*, it also includes the opposite aspect of *teshuvah*. According to the opinion of Rabbi, “Yom Kippur atones for those who repent, as well for those who do not repent.” Thus, Yom Kippur helps even for those who don’t do *teshuvah* – those who are at the point where there is no *teshuvah*.

The sage Rabbi Elisha ben Avuya, who became known as “Acher” (lit. “Other”, in reference to his evil ways), became a heretic. He heard a *bas kol* (heavenly voice) emanating from the Holy of Holies, which said, “Return, wayward sons – except for Elisha ben Avuya, who knows My strength and rebels against Me.”¹¹⁹ Acher was at the point where he could not do *teshuvah*.

In our own souls as well, there is this point which is like “those who do not repent” – there is a point in the soul which is like the situation of Acher, where we are being told that we cannot do *teshuvah*.

Thus, according to the opinion of Rabbi, that Yom Kippur atones even for those who do not repent, it is because Yom Kippur contains a point that is “above” the realm of *teshuvah*. Yom Kippur atones even for those who don’t repent because “the essence of the day atones”, and this point is “above” the point of *teshuvah*.

The verse “*The mikveh of Yisrael, is Hashem*”, which the Sages say refers to Yom Kippur, is the aspect of *teshuvah* on Yom Kippur. But the fact that “Yom Kippur atones for those who don’t repent” reveals a higher aspect in Yom Kippur, that there is a deeper point than *teshuvah*.

There is a “*teshuvah*” aspect in the Ten Days of Repentance, which is the strongest at its climax, Yom Kippur. On the other hand, Yom Kippur also contains an aspect that is totally unrelated to the nine days of repentance that preceded it: it atones even for those who don’t repent, even for those who are like Acher, who are beyond *teshuvah*. In that sense, Yom Kippur is totally unrelated to the Ten days of Repentance, which are in the realm of *teshuvah* [for Yom Kippur has an aspect that is above the realm of *teshuvah* entirely].

יום כיפור 004 – תשובה ולמעלה מן התשובה 118

119 Yerushalmi Chagigah 2:1

Movement/Teshuvah and Beyond Movement/No Need For Teshuvah

Creation is entirely movement. *Teshuvah* is part of the “movements” of Creation; with *teshuvah*, a person returns to his root, which is a kind of movement. When something has been returned to its root, it has undergone *teshuvah*. But there is a higher point, which is beyond movement [and hence, beyond the limits of Creation] – the point where there is no movement.

The second set of *Luchos* was given on Yom Kippur, and they were given discreetly. As opposed to the first giving of the Torah, where we all “received” the Torah from its Giver and we thereby had a “grasp” on the Torah, in the second set of *Luchos*, we had no “grasp” on it, for it was given privately, to Moshe. The second set of *Luchos* was about a higher, deeper point: to become integrated with the Creator.

This is the secret contained in Yom Kippur, which contains the point that is above the Ten days of Repentance – and “above” *teshuvah*.

This point also represents a whole different kind of connection to Hashem through the Torah. Through the first set of *Luchos*, there was a giving and receiving of the Torah to all of the Jewish people together; through the second of *Luchos*, we, the receivers, became integrated with our Giver. When a person reaches Torah through integrating his being with Hashem, through recognizing the wisdom of the Torah as being one with Hashem – he is connected to the Torah not through being a “receiver” of it, but because he is “integrating” himself with the Creator; and as a result, he becomes integrated with His wisdom, with His Torah.

The Sages said that Torah scholars are always in movement [and therefore they have no serenity on this world]. They are always encountering revelations of wisdom, and this is part of the sphere of *chochmah* (wisdom) that becomes revealed to them. The revelations there are unlimited. But there is a higher point: “No thought can grasp Him” – there is nowhere to go from there, and the only place to be is to stand with Hashem, as in the verse, “*And you, here, stand with Me.*”

Acher was told that he cannot do *teshuvah*. His mistake was that he thought he is forever destined never to enjoy the World To Come, as the Gemara explains; therefore, he felt he had no choice but to indulge in this world. He reached the point of no movement, where he felt that he had nowhere else to go – but he reached this in the side of evil. If he would have used this concept in the side of holiness, he would have revealed the point of standing only with Hashem, of “*And you here, stand with Me*”, with nowhere else to go other than being with Hashem. The *bas kol* was therefore really telling him that he should stay where he is, with Hashem, for there is nothing besides Hashem – *Ain Od Milvado*. From the perspective of “*Ain Od Milvado*” (“There is nothing else besides for Hashem”) there is nowhere else to go, other than Hashem.

Yom Kippur atones even “for those who don’t repent”, and the deeper meaning to this is that it reveals the state of *Ain Od Milvado*. “Those who don’t repent” refers to the point beyond *teshuvah*, where there is no movement – for there is only *Ain Od Milvado*, nothing besides for Hashem.

The Day of HaKadosh Baruch Hu

Yom Kippur is also called “Day of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.”¹²⁰ It is the day where the perspective of the “*Yechidah*” part of the soul is revealed, which is: *Ain Od Milvado*, nothing else besides for Hashem. When there is *Ain Od Milvado*, there is no concept of *teshuvah*, because there, there is no need for it.

This is the innermost point contained in Yom Kippur: it is to reach the point where all the creations are attached with Hashem, integrated with Him, for there is simply nothing else besides for Hashem; and therefore, there is no *teshuvah* in this point.

[We each have a “limited” aspect as well as an “unlimited” aspect, and our *avodah* is to connect to both of these points.] *Teshuvah* is within our “limited” aspect, [where we acknowledge our limitations and we take responsibility for them]. The point beyond *teshuvah*, where there is *Ain Od Milvado*, is our “unlimited” aspect.

They are both true, and they do not cancel each other out. The “*Ain Od Milvado*” aspect, the point beyond *teshuvah*, is not meant to nullify the idea of *teshuvah*, G-d forbid, which includes regret, confession, and resolve not to commit the sin again. Rather, a person needs to become connected to both points. On one hand, one needs to connect to our “limited” aspect, and to do *teshuvah* with all of its requirements. On the other hand, one must also connect to the “*Yechidah*”, the unlimited aspect, where there is no *teshuvah*.

Shame over sin only exists in the sphere of *chochmah* (wisdom), which is parallel to the “*Chayah*” level of the soul. But above the *chochmah*\Chayah, in the “*Yechidah*” level of the soul, there is no shame, and hence no *teshuvah* there, for there is nothing there but the *atzmityus* (essence) of Hashem, where there is only attachment with Hashem (*d'veykus*) and integration (*hiskalelus*) in Him.

A Deeper Understanding of Ne'ilah

The day of Yom Kippur concludes with *Ne'ilah*. [The following gives us a deeper understanding into *Ne'ilah*.]

The wicked king Menashe, at the end of his life, began to do *teshuvah*. The angels sealed the heavens from him, so that his supplications should not be heard. They said to Hashem, “Master of the world, a man who erected an idol in the Sanctuary – shall You accept his repentance?” Hashem responded to them, “If I do not accept his repentance, I would be closing the entrance for all penitents.” Hashem dug a tunnel directly underneath His throne of glory, a place where no angel could control [so that Menashe’s prayers could reach Him].

The word “*Menashe*” is the word “*Moshe*” combined with the letter *nun*. This is a hint that the “*Shaar HaNun*”, the “Fiftieth Gate”, which even Moshe did not reach, was reached by Menashe, in

¹²⁰ *Eliyahu Rabbah 1*

the side of evil, that is – and therefore the gates of the heavens were sealed from him. Hashem dug a tunnel underneath His throne of glory, which symbolizes a point that is above *teshuvah*.

This is the secret of *Ne'ilah*. The time of *Ne'ilah* resembles the situation of Menashe, when all the gates of the heavens were closed to him, and it was not possible for him to do *teshuvah*. How could this be, if the climax of the atonement on Yom Kippur is at *Ne'ilah*? How can it be that by *Ne'ilah* there is no possibility of *teshuvah*? But this is the secret of Yom Kippur. When the gates of heaven are closed, and there is no possibility of *teshuvah*, it is precisely then that “*Ain Od Milvado*” is revealed – and then there is no need for *teshuvah*, for it is the point “above” *teshuvah*. It is the point of *Ain Od Milvado*, simply put – and no “movements” are possible, hence, there is no *teshuvah* there; there are no concepts of distance or closeness there. There is just the attachment and integration with Hashem.

The secret of *Ne'ilah* is that it is where everything is closed and sealed, and it is not possible to move there. When there is no movement, a person can stand with Hashem alone. There, there is nowhere to go, and there is no need to go anywhere. That is the point of total integration with Hashem.

Ain Od Milvado “closes off” everything, and doesn’t allow for any movements; it is the full realization where Hashem’s Presence fills everything, and there is nowhere else for a person to go from there; when a person is at that point where there is no movement, he understands that it is not possible to be distanced, nor come closer. That is the secret behind *Ne'ilah*.

During *Selichos*, we recite the 13 traits of *rachamim* (mercy). That is in the point where sin is possible. But when a person connects to the point of *Ain Od Milvado*, he is in a realm where there is no *teshuvah*, of “those who do not repent” – to enter the world of Hashem, before sin existed, where there was nothing lacking in Creation. [One must do both, as will be explained soon].

When we understand that there is a point of “*You, here, stand with Me*”, which is integration with Hashem - there is no need to go anywhere else, because everything is complete there. This is the innermost point of *teshuvah*, which, as we have clarified here, is really a point beyond *teshuvah*.

Mashiach ben Yosef (Teshuvah) and Mashiach ben Dovid (Ain Od Milvado)

The two Messiahs, Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben Dovid, are parallel to these two points. Mashiach ben Yosef is parallel to the concept of *teshuvah*. The Ten Martyrs were killed in order to rectify Yosef’s sin [according to the Sages, for accidentally spilling ten droplets of seed, as he was escaping the wife of Potiphar], and Mashiach ben Yosef’s work will be to bring the world to do *teshuvah*, and to hasten the redemption. Mashiach ben Dovid, though, will reveal the point beyond *teshuvah* [the perspective of *Ain Od Milvado*].

Chazal say of Dovid HaMelech, “Whoever says that Dovid sinned, is mistaken.”¹²¹ On the other hand, *Chazal* state that Dovid brought a *korbon* in order to do *teshuvah*.¹²² This is an apparent contradiction. If he did not sin, why did he do *teshuvah* for it? The answer to this is because that is exactly the secret that Dovid HaMelech revealed [as follows].

The concept of *teshuvah* was not introduced by Dovid HaMelech, but by Kayin; after Kayin did *teshuvah*, Adam HaRishon learned from this and also did *teshuvah*. Dovid HaMelech took 70 years of Adam’s life, and the inner meaning of this is that he actualized the potential of Adam, and he revealed to the world the concept of *teshuvah* which Adam had done – not the *teshuvah* which Adam learned from Kayin, but the *teshuvah* which Adam did even before Kayin.

“Whoever says that Dovid sinned, is mistaken” - how is this possible, if there are verses that state explicitly that Dovid sinned? It is because it refers to the point where there is no possibility of sin. When Dovid brought a *korbon* to do *teshuvah*, it was from the point of above *teshuvah*. The simple level of *teshuvah* is learned from Kayin, but the “higher” level of *teshuvah* was revealed to the world by Dovid HaMelech [and on a private level, with Adam HaRishon]. This is actually the root of the revelation of Mashiach ben Dovid.

When the points of “Mashiach ben Yosef” [*teshuvah*] and “Mashiach ben Dovid” [above *teshuvah*] become integrated with each other [in the future], the points of *teshuvah* and beyond *teshuvah* will become integrated, and this will reveal the secret that is *Ain Od Milvado*.

There is the point of movement, and the point of non-movement, which are parallel to *teshuvah* (movement) and non-movement (*Ain Od Milvado*, above *teshuvah*), and the complete level is when these two points become integrated together [when one does *teshuvah* for his sins, from the recognition that there is nothing besides for Hashem, *Ain Od Milvado*].

Thus, from a deep understanding, the entire possibility to return to Hashem after sinning, is only enabled when one is aware of the point where there is no sin. In other words, there is a [spiritual] light where there is no possibility of sin, which radiates even into our own dimension, where sin is possible; and that light is actually the root that enables a person to do *teshuvah* in our realm where there is sin.

Teshuvah For The Sin of Damaging The Holy Covenant

The *Zohar* states that there is no *teshuvah* for one who damages the Holy Covenant. Elsewhere, the *Zohar* states that *teshuvah* can rectify this sin. This apparent contradiction is resolved by the Sages, who explained that there are two levels of *teshuvah* – “lower *teshuvah*”, which is on the level of *chochmah* (wisdom), and “higher *teshuvah*”, which is on the level of *binah* (“understanding”). It is explained that the words of the *Zohar* that *teshuvah* doesn’t help for this sin is only referring to

¹²¹ *Shabbos 56a*

¹²² *Moed Katan 16a*

“lower *teshuvah*”, but if one does “higher *teshuvah*” - on the level of *binah* - it can rectify the sin.¹²³ Let us understand the depth to this.

Yosef's sin was in damaging the Holy Covenant, of which it is said that there is no *teshuvah* for. Here we can see the point where “Mashiach ben Yosef” and “Mashiach ben Dovid” will integrate with each other: In the level of “Yosef” (and, by extension, Mashiach ben Yosef), there is *teshuvah* for all sins, except for the sin of damaging the Holy Covenant. But if there is no *teshuvah* for this sin, what is the higher *teshuvah* that can atone for this sin, as the Zohar mentions?

The “higher *teshuvah*” that helps for the sin of damaging the Holy Covenant is when the point beyond *teshuvah* is accessed. Within the realm of *teshuvah*, one who damages the Holy Covenant cannot rectify this sin, because he has created disparity, through separating his seed and causing it to become scattered throughout the world, and he cannot return all of the branches to their root. But when one reveals the point where disparity isn't possible, where it is retroactively revealed that there was never a disparity at all – for there is nothing that exists other than the unity of Hashem – in this point, the sin of damaging the Holy Covenant can be rectified.

Within the “49 Gates of Understanding”, there is sin, and there is also *teshuvah* for sin. But in the “50th Gate”, there is no possibility of sin, and hence no need for *teshuvah*. The “49 gates of understanding” are parallel to Yosef, or Mashiach ben Yosef, who represents *chochmah* \wisdom, where there can be sin, and which requires *teshuvah* to fix.

But it is really impossible to do *teshuvah*, from the perspective of This World alone. For this reason, *teshuvah* had to precede Creation, for *teshuvah* is really a power that comes from above the limits of Creation. If *teshuvah* preceded the world, that means it is impossible within our world to reach *teshuvah*, for it is of a higher dimension entirely. So we must reveal the point where there is no necessity for *teshuvah*.

This is the meaning of how *teshuvah* “preceded” the world. As long as a person tries to reach complete *teshuvah* within this world, he will never reach it, because *teshuvah* is a point that is above this Creation, and hence unattainable as we are on this world. Therefore, how do reach *teshuvah*? Only through connecting to the point that precedes the Creation. When one is connected to there, where “No thought can grasp Him”, he can then understand that there is no necessity for *teshuvah*, because there is no sin there.

“*Teshuvah* preceded the world” – when a person progresses throughout *teshuvah*, he may finally reach the 49th gate, the final gate within the realm of *teshuvah*, and there he will find that he cannot rectify every sin, for the sin of damaging the Holy Covenant cannot be rectified. What, then, is *teshuvah*? It means to access the point that precedes the world, to connect oneself to this point – and that, itself, is *teshuvah*!!!

Thus, *teshuvah* does not mean simply to “return” [from sin], but to connect oneself to the point that precedes Creation, where there is no possibility of sin.

¹²³ Editor's Note: The sefer *Keser Rosh* (a student of the Vilna Gaon) explains that through learning in-depth Torah study, one does “*teshuvah* on the level of *binah*” and rectifies the sin of damaging the Holy Covenant.

The Inner, Silencing Voice of the “Yechidah” In The Soul

This is the meaning of how Yom Kippur is the “day of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*”. It is one day of the year where it is revealed that there is a point where there is no necessity for *teshuvah*. This is the deeper understanding of why Yom Kippur atones for “those who do not repent” - Yom Kippur repents of course for those who do repent, and for this, we are given the ten days of repentance; but the deeper point is the point where there is no need for *teshuvah* – “those who do not repent”.

In spite of this, a person must keep the entire Torah, because just as the unlimited point exists, so is our limited point existing and true. Within our “limited” point, we can become either closer or distant from Hashem. But in our “unlimited” aspect, where everything is unified [under the oneness of Hashem, where Hashem rules alone] because there it is entirely “*Ain Od Milvado*” – there is no “closeness” or “distance” from the Creator there. The “*Yechidah*” part of the soul is that point which is so connected to Hashem that no separation can occur there.

From the realm of *chochmah* (or “*Chayah*”) and below in the soul, there are varying levels; there is a need for intimacy, there are levels of closeness, and there, it is possible to either be closer or distant, from Hashem. But in the “*Yechidah*” point of the soul, one is integrated with Hashem – and this is true even in the worst person in the world, who sins in order to anger Hashem. The “*Yechidah*” cannot ever be distanced from Hashem; it cannot be destroyed.

It is the inner, silent voice in the soul, which silences all of the senses of the soul, and which gives a person the ability to hear the true perspective that calls out from deep inside him, which says: *Ain Od Milvado*. This inner voice is being sound all the time, but when a person leaves his connection to Hashem, he will not hear this voice. But when a person attunes his thoughts to it - through the five areas of physical discomfort on Yom Kippur, which enable one to shut out the entire perspective of This World – he will then hear the perspective of the *Yechidah* in his soul, which listens attentively to the fact of *Ain Od Milvado*.

There is no way to express this; there are no words for it. But it is the grasp on *havayah* [the deeper, spiritual dimension of reality)], the way to perceive Creation through the *Yechidah* in the soul, which sees that all is *Ain Od Milvado*. It is reached during the time of *Ne'ilah*, when everything becomes closed off, where there is no movement, for there is nowhere else to go then – it reveals the presence of Hashem, the state of *Ain Od Milvado*.

Of the fiftieth gate, it is said, “*All those who come to it, shall not return*” – there is no *teshuvah* there, there is no movement there, because it is nothing else other than being unified with Hashem. In the point above *teshuvah*, it is revealed the actual meaning of *Ain Od Milvado*. A person’s *avodah* [in doing *teshuvah*] is thus to “return” himself from the realm of *teshuvah*, to the realm where there is no need for *teshuvah* – and when he becomes integrated into that realm, he reveals the actual meaning of *Ain Od Milvado*.

This is the secret of Creation: that there is nothing that separates a person, and anything in the creation, from Hashem. When the soul grasps this point, it becomes integrated with Hashem.

“*Praiseworthy is the man, who does not forget You!*”

3.6 | *Yom Kippur – Atonement*¹²⁴

The Death of Tzaddikim Reminds Us Of The Atonement of Yom Kippur

In *Parashas Vayeilech*, Moshe Rabbeinu informs *Klal Yisrael* that he is about to take leave of the world. *Chazal* teach that “the death of *tzaddikim* (the righteous) is an atonement”. This was said regarding Miriam’s death as well, which atoned for the generation then. It was also said regarding the deaths of Nadav and Avihu.

On Yom Kippur, the Torah reading is about the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, and this is to remind us that just as the death of the *tzaddikim* is an atonement, so is Yom Kippur an atonement.

The Atonement of Death

Not only is the death of the *tzaddikim* an atonement for *Klal Yisrael*, but the death of any individual Jew is an atonement as well, for himself.

The Gemara says that there are four categories of sin, in varying levels of severity, with the more severe sins requiring more elements of *teshuvah*. Violating a positive commandment of the Torah requires just *teshuvah*, whereas violating a prohibition of the Torah requires *teshuvah* and suffering; sins that are of capital punishment in *Beis Din*, or sins that are *kares*¹²⁵, requires the atonement of Yom Kippur in addition to *teshuvah* and suffering, whereas the sin of *chilul Hashem* (profaning the Name of Hashem) is not atoned for except through death, in addition to *teshuvah*, suffering, and Yom Kippur.¹²⁶

Thus, Yom Kippur, the time of atonement, does not always atone for every possible situation. If a person in the times of the *Beis HaMikdash* committed certain sins that required him to bring a *korbon*¹²⁷, he could not be atoned for unless he brought the *korbon*. Yom Kippur also does not atone for people who aren’t interested in doing *teshuvah*; “Yom Kippur atones only for those who return.” Yom Kippur also does not atone for sins committed between man and his friend, unless one has sought forgiveness from his friend beforehand. Yom Kippur also does not atone for the sin of *chilul Hashem*, as mentioned above.

The ultimate and essential kind of atonement is death. Death is the very core of atonement, and it contains a deeper kind of atonement than the atonement of Yom Kippur, as we can see from the

שיחת השבוע 005 וילך – יום כיפור – מיתה מכפרת ¹²⁴

¹²⁵ *kares*- “spiritual excision of the soul”

¹²⁶ *Yoma* 86a

¹²⁷ *sacrifice*

fact that Yom Kippur alone does not atone for the sin of *chilul Hashem*, and it is only atoned for with death.

Yom Kippur – The Gateway To Attaining The Level of “Death”

The simple understanding of this is because even when we are atoned for on Yom Kippur, this atonement is not completed yet, and there is still greater depth to uncover, which could be attained through death; after all, the only thing that atones for the sin of *chilul Hashem* is death, so death must be a deeper and more complete kind of atonement than Yom Kippur is.

But to have a clearer understanding of this matter, on Rosh HaShanah, it is written who will live and who will die, and on Yom Kippur this is sealed; the “books of life and death” are open in front of Hashem, which simply means who will live or die this year, but the deeper understanding of the “books of death” is not referring to physical death, but to attain an atonement on a level of “death”, which a person may access through Yom Kippur. Thus, Yom Kippur serves as the gateway to enter further into the atonement, and to attain the level of “death” - without having to actually die.

The Purity on Yom Kippur: The Removal of The Barriers of Sin

To explain this, Yom Kippur is a day in which we are cleansed from sin, it is a day of purity (“*For on this day, you will be purified*”), where the muck of sin is removed from us; the prophet refers to sin as “dirty clothing” upon us, and the atonement of Yom Kippur is essentially a removal of this “dirty clothing” from upon us, thereby cleansing us from sin and purifying us. That is essentially the “purity” which Yom Kippur brings upon us.

When the impurity of sin is removed from us, the barriers that were created between us and Hashem from the sin are removed, and “the iron wall that separates between Yisrael and their Father in Heaven” is torn; this was said of the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, where a thick barrier was created between us and Hashem afterwards, and it is also said of all sins in general, which creates a barrier between one and Hashem. Whenever a person feels that he is far away from Hashem, this feeling actually comes as a result of sin, which causes a person to feel distant from Hashem. But Yom Kippur comes and brings purity upon a person, in the sense that it removes these barriers created by sin.

Of the Ten Days of Repentance, it is said, “*Seek Hashem, where He is found*”, implying that Hashem is closer in proximity to us, during these ten days. But on Yom Kippur, there is an even more special degree of closeness. The atonement and purity of Yom Kippur removes the sins from upon a person, and now there can be greater closeness between one and Hashem.

When sin is removed from a person, it is like laundering a soiled article of clothing - the more one washes it, the cleaner it will come out; so, too, the deeper *teshuvah* that a person does, the purer he becomes through the atonement of Yom Kippur, and he will attain a level of “*A pure heart You*

created me with” to that degree. But the less a person did *teshuvah*, or the less earnest it is, although every level of *teshuvah* is accepted by Hashem, still, it is not “*teshuvah shelaimah*” (complete repentance), and it will not bring purity upon a person, unless a person has done true *teshuvah*.

Teshuvah of “Before Creation” and Teshuvah of “After Creation”

There are essentially two different levels of *teshuvah*: The power of *teshuvah* on the level of “before Creation”, and the power of *teshuvah* on the level of “after Creation”.

Chazal state that Hashem created *teshuvah* even before He created the world, and this is the power of *teshuvah* of “before Creation”, which is a deeper and more powerful kind of *teshuvah*, for it is from a dimension in which there was no possibility of sin yet. When a person uses the power of *teshuvah* of “before Creation”, he is accessing the root of becoming a totally “new being”, just as in the beginning state of Creation; this enables him to gain a “pure heart”, enabling him to return to a state in which he not only repents from the sin, but that the sin is completely erased, for he has returned to the point of before the sin.

Doing *teshuvah* on a level of “after Creation” can also purify a person, but it cannot bring a person back to the original pure state as if the sin was never here before.

Earnest Teshuvah On Yom Kippur Results In A Greater Sense of Feeling Hashem

Therefore, the deeper one’s *teshuvah* is, the closer it is to “*teshuvah shelaimah*” (complete repentance), and in turn, the more barriers between him and Hashem are removed. Then he will feel strongly a palpable sense of Hashem’s existence - which is the depth of the *neshamah* (the Divine soul) that can feel the reality of the Creator. The more earnest a person’s *teshuvah* is, the more he removes the barriers created by sin, and he gains greater recognition of Hashem’s existence.

This is the depth of what it means to “find” Hashem during the days of *teshuvah*. On Rosh HaShanah, a person can attain the first level of closeness with Hashem, and on Yom Kippur a person can find the deeper level of closeness. As we explained here, the level of Yom Kippur enables a person to remove the barriers created by sin, and the more earnest that a person’s *teshuvah* is, the more the barriers are removed, and subsequently, the more a person will sense the presence of Hashem. But as we emphasized, it will depend on how much one has done *teshuvah*; of how much purity he has attained.

If one indeed merits to do *teshuvah* from the depths of his heart, and he palpably feels Hashem more and more - when it is a true sense that he can feel, then, in the words of the *Mesillas Yesarim*, he will be “pulled after Hashem, like a magnet is drawn after iron, as it is written, “*Pull me after You, quickly.*” The nature of the soul is that it is pulled after its Source, Hashem. This is not an “*avodah*” (task), nor does it take exertion; rather, it is natural for the soul.

But as long as the barriers created by sin exist, a person will not feel this magnetic pull after Hashem, and it is like placing something in between the two magnets, or distancing the two magnets from each other, which will take away the pull.

The deeper of a level of purity that one attains on Yom Kippur, and the more he removes the barriers created by sin, not only will this cause a person to feel closer to Hashem, but he will feel a desire for this closeness, more than anything else that he wants, and it will feel blissful and pleasant.

Being Willing To Die For Hashem

The deaths of Nadav and Avihu, which we read about on Yom Kippur, is to remind us that just as death of the righteous is an atonement, so is Yom Kippur an atonement. The holy *Ohr HaChaim* explained, at length, of a penetrating interpretation of the matter of the deaths of these two great *tzaddikim*. The *Ohr HaChaim* explained that Nadav and Avihu died a very blissful kind of death that resembled the “kiss of death” of Hashem, which only certain *tzaddikim* merit. They knew that in drawing close to Hashem in the *Kodesh Kodashim* that they would die in the process, but they were willing to die for this, because they wanted this high level of closeness with Hashem, out of their great love for Him.¹²⁸

This is really the depth of Yom Kippur. It is the time where the purity of our soul can come forth.

During the rest of the year, although our soul is always pure, for we state every day in the morning “*My G-d, a pure soul You gave to me*”, we do not always feel the purity of the soul. But on Yom Kippur, if one truly repents, he can reveal himself as a pure soul. On Yom Kippur, we resemble the angels, by foregoing the needs of our physical body, and instead living a soul kind of life, on this day. That is the purity of Yom Kippur – to reveal the purity of our own soul. This is our own personal *avodah* of Yom Kippur. Once we reveal the purity of our soul, our soul will naturally be pulled after Hashem, and it will feel a pleasurable bliss in this newfound closeness with Hashem.

The desire to get closer to Hashem on Yom Kippur is the depth behind the matter of the four categories of atonement (*teshuvah*, suffering, Yom Kippur, and death). The sin of *chilul Hashem* can only be atoned through all four levels of atonement: *teshuvah*, suffering, Yom Kippur, and death. What, essentially, is the “atonement” achieved by death? On a general level, the death of *tzaddikim* atones, but on an individual level, the death of any person can atone for himself – and it can resemble the death of *tzaddikim*, such as the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, when they died amidst their desire to achieve greater closeness with Hashem. Their deaths became a means for them to reach the greater closeness with Hashem, and this is the depth of how “death atones”.

During the rest of the year, when we recite *Shema*, upon saying the word “*Echad*”, there is a [pious, non-obligatory] intention that one can have in mind of being willing to die *al kiddush Hashem* (in sanctification of Hashem’s Name). While most people today are not on the level of

¹²⁸ *Ohr HaChaim: Vayikra 16:1*

being consciously willing to die *al kiddush Hashem*, one can still contemplate it as he says *Shema*. It is not on our actual level, though, during the rest of the year, to be willing to die for Hashem. But there is one day of the year - Yom Kippur - where each of us can be on this level, of being willing to die for Hashem.

The Steps Of The Inner Avodah On Yom Kippur

If one can feel the purity on Yom Kippur, he can then begin the true inner *avodah* of Yom Kippur.

The first step of the *avodah* is to truly do *teshuvah*, earnestly, from the depths of your heart, and only Hashem can testify what level a person has reached in his heart. If one has indeed done true *teshuvah*, he will surely feel a palpable closeness with Hashem as a result. If he doesn't feel the closeness, it means that he hasn't done complete *teshuvah*.

If you do feel the closeness on Yom Kippur, you have reached the first step, and the next step is to feel the pleasantness of this closeness, and then desire to get closer to it, and closer, and closer.

After that point, comes the true test, the point of *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice), of being willing to give up your life for this. During the rest of the year, you may not be consciously willing to die for this closeness with Hashem. But on Yom Kippur, you can reach a point where you are willing to give yourself up for this. You can now reach the point that Nadav and Avihu desired, of being willing to die, for more and more closeness with Hashem.

The Ultimate Test

If you reach that point, this will be your choice: Do you want to get closer and closer to Hashem - even if it will mean dying for it? Or do you want to return to the lowly world? What do you choose?

True, this is a level that most people cannot be on. Most people are not willing to die for more closeness with Hashem. But we see that even during the rest of the year, where we are nowhere near this level of *mesirus nefesh*, at least we have are able to have some kind of intention when reciting *Shema* that we are willing to have *mesirus nefesh*, to be willing to die for Hashem; and even if we don't really mean it when we think about it, as long as we had tiny sliver of earnest intention for this as we said it, we have a greater chance of reaching this level on Yom Kippur, and to really want it.

If you are willing to die to reach more closeness with Hashem on Yom Kippur, this is like the atonement of death, which is the greatest level of atonement, which atones even for the most severe sin of all, the sin of *chilul Hashem*. But this entails a deep power of choice that you make on Yom Kippur, of what you really, really want.

The Depths of The Heart

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 "סלה לנו, מחל לנו, כפר 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.

In Summary

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.

In Conclusion

May Hashem help us be clear about the goal of this day of Yom Kippur, to know clearly why exactly we seek to be forgiven and atoned. It shouldn't just be known to us on an intellectual level; rather, we should feel it in our heart, of why we really seek atonement.

May we merit that these requests to be forgiven and atoned should stem from our innermost depths, from a clear recognition and a true desire, to remove the barriers that have formed between us and Hashem, and to genuinely feel His closeness to us.

Then, may we all merit together to feel the Creator, to feel the pleasantness of sensing Hashem's existence, to be pulled after him like a magnetic pull, and may we be willing to give all our strength and all of our soul for this.

Then, perhaps, we will have some connection to the levels that were described here, in spite of the fact that they are very high levels which most of us will probably never completely reach; for any person can at least reach this on some degree, on the current level that one stands at, and thereby gain a greater desire to become closer to Hashem, to give up more of his life for this closeness. And by doing so, one draws closer to the essence of the day of Yom Kippur.

Through this, may we all merit together to be sealed for a "good year", in the truer sense – a life of "*And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good.*"

3.7 | *Leaving Behind Evil*¹²⁹

2 Ways To Leave Behind Internal Evil

Generally speaking, there are two ways to leave behind the internal evil that we find in ourselves: [1- Identifying our essence as pure, and 2- separating from the world].

The Atonement and Purity of Yom Kippur: Believing In Our Inherent Purity

The main purity and atonement of Yom Kippur is for one to believe that his soul can receive purity from Hashem (“*Before Hashem, be purified*”), and thereby purify the rest of his physical body. One needs to believe that this purity *is* who he is. If after Yom Kippur one feels pure, it means that he has succeeded in identifying that this purity is who he truly is.

Yom Kippur is not merely about a spirit of purity that comes upon a person, which will come again next year. Rather, it reveals the purity of a Jew’s soul. Certainly, the process of *teshuvah* is needed in order to reveal this purity, but when the purity comes, it is the revelation of the true self of a Jew.

Therefore, the perspective towards Yom Kippur should not be that we are merely trying to remove more and more evil from upon ourselves. Our sins are like “dirty clothing” upon us (as the *Maharal* taught), but our very essence always remains pure. That is the depth of the atonement of Yom Kippur.

The word for atonement, *kaparah*, is from the word *kofer*, tar, which covers something. This is a hint that our sins are only like a covering on top of us, but our essence always remains pure.

The Rambam says that a *baal teshuvah* is not the same person he was before. Why isn’t he the same person? True, he has changed his deeds, but isn’t he the same person? But if a person has done true *teshuvah*, he is *not* the same person anymore!! Change of action can reveal the person’s true essence – as long as he one is aware of this perspective that *teshuvah* makes us pure and that it reveals our true essence as pure.

Differentiating Our Essence From The Nations of the World

The *Maharal* says that any sin of a Jew is always “*mikreh*”, happenstance; it is not an intrinsic part of his being. But one must be aware of this perspective. If a Jew thinks that his very essence is no different than a gentile’s, he does not receive the purification of Yom Kippur.

יום כיפור 031 – הבדלה בין טוב לרע – בין ישראל ואומות 129

There must be a separation made between Jew and gentile. Today especially, we are mixed with the gentiles, whether we live outside Eretz Yisrael or in Eretz Yisrael. But even in this exile, a Jew must be able to make the differentiation between Jew and gentile, in his own soul. On Yom Kippur, one is allowed to pray with sinners in the same *shul*, but if a Jew thinks that he is essentially the same as a gentile, he is not able to permit himself to pray with the sinners, because he has mixed himself with gentiles and he has not made himself separate from them. Only after one has separated himself from the gentile nations can he permit himself to pray with the sinners in the Jewish people.

Most Jews today are unaware of this perspective and as a result, they view sins as part of their essence. They do not feel like they are any different from gentiles, and it is really because they have not yet made the distinction between Jew and gentile. But when a Jew makes the separation, by understanding that he is essentially different in his very soul than a gentile's, the spiritual light on Yom Kippur will then shine for him. He will be enabled to leave behind the mixture of good and evil that fills the world, and he becomes purified, on Yom Kippur.

The soul of a Jew is then revealed in its purity. The separation between Yaakov and Esav becomes clear. And then the Jew can enter into the true spiritual depths of Yom Kippur, and to do *teshuvah* on a truer level, from that place of purity and separateness from the nations of the world. If one does true *teshuvah*, he will then feel the truth, which is that his soul is pure: "*My G-d, the soul You gave to me is pure.*" Then he will truly feel that he stands "before Hashem" on Yom Kippur, to be purified. One then reveals his true self, and he will see all evil in him as merely a "layer" upon him that he needs to remove, like dirty clothing. That is the true atonement of Yom Kippur. But if one feels that his sins are still attached to him and a part of his true self, then he cannot reach this level.

The depth of our *avodah* on Yom Kippur is to leave this day with a new "I" entirely, as the Rambam says, that a *baal teshuvah* is an entirely new being, and not the same person as before. This should not be felt by a person only on an intellectual level, but as an entirely new attitude and recognition that the person has, towards himself.

In Summary and In Conclusion

May Hashem merit us, firstly, that we make the separation of the Jewish people from the gentile nations. If there are any non-Jewish elements that are in our homes, the first thing we need to do is to get rid of these influences. Then we should take notice of any non-Jewish elements that are in our own souls, and to "give a divorce" to all of these elements from within ourselves.

It is clear to any sensible person that the present situation in today's generation is a total antithesis to the distinction of the Jewish people from the gentile nations. It is exactly the "50 gates of defilement", which is the total mixing with gentile influences.

If one can separate himself from the world by realizing his that his Jewish essence is apart from that of other nations, and he enters Yom Kippur from awareness of the difference between the Jewish souls and the gentile souls, he can then merit on Yom Kippur to be purified and sanctified,

and to be drawn closer to *“Before Hashem you shall be purified”*, and then he can truly merit to stand before Hashem. Then he can reach the true recognition that his soul is pure, and that all sin is like a dirty garment upon us. And then he will be able to come to true regret, confession, and resolving not to sin¹³⁰, now that he has made the separation between the mixture of good and evil.

May we all merit together, with this, to complete the Creation, and then perhaps we will all merit the complete Redemption, which will be the ultimate separation between good and evil. But here we have said the very least we can each do, on a personal level, within the Jewish people, amongst those who seek Hashem, to connect ourselves to good, as it is written, *“And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good”*, and to separate ourselves from evil. And through this, we shall all merit to be written and sealed, for a good year.

130 The four basic parts of the teshuvah process are: 1) azivas hacheit, abandoning the sin. 2) charatah, regret. 3) viduy, confession. 4) kaballah al ha'asid – resolving not to commit the sin in the future.

3.8 | *The Five Steps of Te-sh-u-v-ah*¹³¹

“Te-sh-u-v-ah”: An Acronym for Five Different Spiritual Tasks

There is a teaching from our Rabbis¹³² that the word *teshuvah* (תשובה) stands for the following five fundamentals in our *avodah* (spiritual task):

1. תמים תהי' עם ה' אלוקיך – “Be simple with Hashem, your G-d.”
2. שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד – “I place Hashem opposite me, always.”
3. ואהבת לרעך כמוך – “And you shall love your friend like yourself.”
4. בכל דרכיך דעהו – “In all your ways, know Him.”
5. הצנע לכת עם אלוקיך – “Walk modestly with Hashem your G-d.”

We will try here, with the help of Hashem, to reflect into these five aspects involved in doing *teshuvah*. These five concepts are not randomly placed together. Rather, they all bear a connection to *teshuvah*, which means to “return”, to one’s root, to his source, to his beginning. Thus, the five verses quoted above are essentially five ways of how one can return to his source.

We will try to explain here how one can practically work on each of these concepts. To work on all of these five steps, practically speaking, is obviously too difficult. Instead, each of us should pick of one these concepts to work on, which is certainly within our power of *bechirah* (free will) to do, in these days of *teshuvah*.

1. “Be Simple With Hashem Your G-d” - Returning To Our Childlike Purity

The first concept of *teshuvah* is: תמים תהי' עם ה' אלוקיך, “Be simple with Hashem your G-d”.

Each of us, when we are born, is born with a quality called *temimus* (earnestness). As we grow older, naturally, this *temimus* gets covered over. We can see clearly that young children are pure and trusting, and as they grow older, they begin to know the world around them, and they see that they cannot trust the world that much as they used to. They get used to seeing a world that is far from *temimus*, and as a result, they learn to stifle their own *temimus*, so that they can fit into their surroundings.

A child will naturally do anything that others do, believing that everyone around them is pure and acting correctly. There is a deep place in the soul as well, our *temimus*, which is pure and trusting. But this *temimus* becomes hidden from use with the more we grow older and we want to

¹³¹ יום כיפור 028 – ת-ש-ו-ג-ב-ה

¹³² This is said in the name of the Baal HaTanya (Reb Shneur Zalman of Liadi) and Reb Zusha of Anipoli

mimic our surroundings. But the *temimus* that remains inside us, deep down, remains dormant in us, as a holy power, a power to be completely trusting of Hashem.

If we wouldn't be born with this power of *temimus*, it would be too difficult for us to acquire this power, because it wouldn't be in our resources. But Hashem, in His great mercy, imbued us with this natural ability, from birth, so that we can regain this nature whenever we need it. We don't need to acquire this quality of *temimus* from scratch. Rather, all we need to do is return to our original purity which we are born with. It has merely become covered over and hidden from our conscious awareness. But it is there, deep in our soul.

In this time of the year, when our *avodah* is to do seek atonement and do *teshuvah*, anyone with a Jewish soul that is a bit opened, will cry tears to Hashem.

Who usually cries, a child or an adult? Generally speaking, a child cries more than an adult. During this time of the year of *teshuvah*, each and every one of us can naturally return, on some degree, to a state of mind that resembles our pure, childlike state. That is why we can easily cry during these days, epitomizing the verse, “*And purify our hearts, to serve You in truth.*”

These days are the time of which it says, “*Before Hashem, be purified*”, where we return to a place of simplicity in ourselves, the inner child in ourselves, of trusting in Hashem. This *temimus* is still in us and it is especially apparent during these days of *teshuvah*, and it enables us to cry to Hashem, simply, and earnestly. Once a year, we have this opportunity to return to our childlike state. As Dovid HaMelech said, “*Like an infant on his mother's lap.*” We can return to this simple, earnest place in ourselves.

During the rest of the year, it is hard to be in this state of mind. But when we are in front of Hashem during these days, we can let this part of ourselves out from hiding, setting our inner childlike state free, and to let it run to Hashem and cry.

To access this power in ourselves, we may employ the use of our imagination, such as by imagining a child crying in his or her mother's lap, and to further imagine how the parent lovingly fulfills the child's request.

The blow of the *shofar* of Rosh HaShanah is considered to be a form of crying, the Gemara says. When a child is born, he cannot say a thing, and all he can do is cry to his parents. The sound of the *shofar* is like the child's cry, and it is a hint that one should be like a child, who can easily cry to his parents; to be able to naturally cry to Hashem.

This concludes with Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur, there is also crying, but it is not a crying of sadness and mourning, which is the crying we have in the month of *Av*. Rather, it is a crying of longing for Hashem, like a child who cries for his parents when he sees his parents leaving the house and leaving him alone.

That is the first part of *teshuvah*: “Be simple, with Hashem your G-d.” It is our *temimus*. Sit quietly with yourself, and return to a place in yourself which is childlike, pure and trusting, the purest place that exists deep inside you, which is always there. From there, from that place in

yourself, turn to Hashem, and let your crying come forth, letting it flow from your innermost depths. Let us feel that this is the depth of the *avodah* during these days – “Be wholesome with Hashem your G-d” – and to live with this *temimus*.

2 – “I Place Hashem Opposite Me, Always” – Becoming Cognizant of Hashem’s Presence

The second concept contained in *teshuvah* is: שׁוֹיִתִּי ה' לנגדי תמיד, “I place Hashem opposite me, always.”

As is well-known, the *Rema* in the very beginning of *Shulchan Aruch* begins with these words: “*Shivisi Hashem L’negdi tamid*” – “I place Hashem opposite me, always” – “This is the great rule in the praiseworthiness of the righteous, who walk before G-d. For the way a person sits and moves in his house does not compare to the way he sits and moves in the house of the king and when he is in front of the king.”

The *Rema*’s words here are speaking about the way a Jew should conduct himself during the entire year, but the especially auspicious time of the year to practically work on this concept is during these days of repentance. The Gemara says of the ten days of repentance that one should “Seek Hashem where He is found, call out to Him where he is close”. Now is the time where a person should especially seek out closeness to Hashem, because Hashem is closer to us during this time of the year.

Therefore, even it is too high of a level to try to live with the state of “*Shivisi Hashem L’negdi Tamid*” – and indeed, it is a high level to always live in it – at least during the ten days of repentance, and certainly at least on Yom Kippur, we should try to attain the state of *Shivisi Hashem L’negdi Tamid*.

So 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.

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.

Many times while people are *davening*, their thoughts are floating all over the place and they forget they are *davening*. Sometimes people are even so immersed in what they are *davening* for, that they forget that they are standing before Hashem, and with Whom they are speaking! They forget where they are.

Part of doing *teshuvah* is working upon this concept of “*Shivisi Hashem L’Negdi Tamid*”. The *Rema* says that this is the entire praise of the *tzaddikim*, but even if we cannot be on this level, at least we can aspire for it. After all, “One is obligated to say: “When will my actions reach that of my forefathers?” Although we cannot reach the level of the *Avos*, we must aspire to reach their level, and indeed, we can certainly touch upon their level, even if we cannot reach it fully.

If someone merits the level that is “complete *teshuvah*”, he can be in a state of *Shivisi* during the rest of the year as well. But at least during these days of *teshuvah*, any person can strive to touch upon this level, and to bring himself to the level of *Shivisi Hashem L’negdi Tamid*, for just a few moments, and throughout the day.

Even more so, when it is the time to *daven Ne’ilah*, at the end of Yom Kippur, what kind of thought do we end the day with? How do we spend the last moments of Yom Kippur? When we are saying those words, “*L’shanah Habaah B’Yerushalayim!!*” (“Next year in Jerusalem”), we can take a few seconds to think about the ultimate purpose of this day. Think that you are standing in front of Hashem, with nothing dividing between you and Hashem – there are no barriers of sin during these moments. For one moment, bring your soul to a state of being “near” Hashem, and be aware that you are speaking with Him.

How much will this awareness extend into the rest of the year as well? That is relative, and it will depend on the level of each person. But the final thought on Yom Kippur, for each person to think, when we are taking leave of the entire year, is a simple thought: We are standing in front of Hashem, and it is with Him that we speak with. If you merit, you will also have moments throughout the year when you can feel this.

If you go into Yom Kippur with this awareness, starting with the *tefillah* of *Maariv* on Yom Kippur and leaving the final moments of Yom Kippur with this simple thought, you will certainly have a more elevated year, with *siyata d’shmaya*. How elevated will it be?

That is up to how you choose to spend the rest of the year. But if you go into Yom Kippur with this awareness and you also leave Yom Kippur like this, your soul will receive a deeper perspective, a more purified level of truth. Each person will certainly be positively affected, on varying levels, through this purification.

3. “And You Shall Love Your Friend Like Yourself”: The Mutual Unity In The Jewish People

The third way to *teshuvah* is: **וואהבת לרעך כמוך**, “And you shall like your friend like yourself.”

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.

Rabbi Akiva said that Hashem purifies the Jewish people on Yom Kippur, and the same Rabbi Akiva said, “This is the great rule of the Torah: “And you shall love your friend like yourself.” These are not two separate statements of Rabbi Akiva – they are one and the same. The inner essence of Yom Kippur is a Jew’s bond with HaKadosh Baruch Hu, to be purified before Hashem, to be cognizant of Hashem’s presence, and it is also a day of connection with all of the Jewish people.

That is why 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.

Here is an example of how one can improve on the aspect of *ahavas Yisrael* on Yom Kippur. In many *shuls* on Yom Kippur, there are people who are concerned that they should find the best possible place to sit in, worrying solely for themselves, without thinking of how to benefit others. On the holiest day of the year, while standing in front of Hashem, a person may just be entirely self-absorbed, concerned only for himself. But a person on Yom Kippur must think of a possible way to be concerned for others, and make sure that another person is comfortable.

One should look for ways to help someone around him. Another needs help finding seats for his children. Another person will need something else. We should want to *daven* of course, but we also need to be concerned for others, and fulfill “*And you shall love your friend like yourself.*”

Practically speaking, you should do something for someone else on Yom Kippur that will come at the expense of some physical comfort, and even if it deters your spiritual focus. I don’t mean that you should give up your entire spirituality on Yom Kippur in order to help someone. But at least in one area, be prepared to give up from yourself for another, whether it deters you physically or spiritually. Do so from a love for others. This should not be done with the agenda of gaining forgiveness from others, which is a self-serving motivation. Rather, do an act of concern for another simply out of a love for another Jew.

An additional point, related to this, is that when we recite *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.

If you can do the following, try to take upon yourself not to go to sleep at night unless you have done a kindness for a Jew that day. Just do one nice thing a day for another Jew. A day that goes by without doing a kindness for another Jew is a pointless kind of life. The *Nefesh HaChaim* writes that a person was only created to help others. Only rare individuals can be like Avraham Avinu and do chessed all day, but as for the rest of us, we should at least do one kindness every day for another Jew.

If you can help someone in the active sense, by all means, do so. If you can't, at least *daven* for another, or think of how you can help him tomorrow. But don't go to sleep unless you have done one kindness a day for another Jew. That is how you can extend the light of Yom Kippur into the rest of the year. Yom Kippur is not the only day of the year to love all Jews – we can try during the rest of the year as well to resemble the higher level of *ahavas Yisrael* that is more natural on Yom Kippur, by doing at least one kindness a day for another Jew.

4) ***“In All Your Ways, Know Him” – Sanctifying The Physical***

The fourth way to *teshuvah* is: **בכל דרכיך דעהו**, “In all your ways, know Him.”

There is an entire siman in *Shulchan Aruch: Orach Chaim* (231) which explains the laws of this *mitzvah*. In simpler terms, there is so much we do each day. We each do hundreds of tasks each day – physical, and spiritual. We do spiritual acts each day, such as prayer, and there are much physical tasks we do each day. “In all your ways, know Him” means that even our physical acts should be with a spiritual intention.

It would be a very high level to turn all of our physical acts into spiritual acts. That would be the complete level of “In all your ways know Him”, and we cannot try to grab high levels too fast. Instead, we should work on this gradually. Pick one physical act during the day and add a spiritual intention to it.

Here is a simple example, which is applicable to 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.

5) “Walk Modestly With Your G-d”: External and Internal Modesty

The final part of *teshuvah* is: **הצנוע לכת עם אלוֹקֵיךְ**, “Walk modestly with your G-d.”

The task of *tzniyus* (modesty) is unique to women, but let’s understand the following fundamental point, which is subtle and deep.

Before a person is born, he\she is a fetus inside the mother, hidden from the rest of the world. Nobody sees him; he is covered completely and he is *tzanua* (hidden, modest). Thus, the very root of our birth begins in a state of *tzniyus*.

The Maharal says that nothing in Creation is coincidental, even the small things; surely, then, it is not a coincidence that the beginning of our birth is in a state of modesty. Why did Hashem make it this way, that before we emerge into the world, we are hidden for nine months? Before a baby is born, he lives an existence for nine months in which he is hidden from the rest of the world. Why did Hashem make it this way? It is to show us that our very beginning is *tzniyus*.

Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur: A Time For Modesty

The beginning of the year, Rosh HaShanah, is certainly a time to strengthen our *tzniyus*. Rosh HaShanah is called “*HaYom Haras Olam*”, the “day of the conception of the world”. Our Sages said that the word “*haras*” is from the word “*herayon*”, conception. Rosh HaShanah is the day in which we are conceived, which serves as a root of *tzniyus* for the rest of the year.

Rosh HaShanah is also where we blow *shofar*, which “covers” over sin; as it is written, **תקעו בשופר** **בכסה**, thus *shofar* is associated with **כסה**, with “covering.” The Sages expound this verse

that said that Rosh HaShanah is a time where the moon is “covered”. The moon becomes more hidden and modest during Rosh HaShanah.¹³³

The ten days from Rosh HaShanah until Yom Kippur, where the moon is more covered over, is thus a time for more modesty. On Yom Kippur, the modesty becomes even more apparent: Either we are praying in shul all day on Yom Kippur, or we are praying in the home, away from the rest of the world.

Of the rest of the year, when it is not Yom Kippur, we can apply the verse, **כל כבודה בת מלך פנימה** – “*All of the honor of a princess, is inside*” – but only in the partial sense. The glory of a Jewish woman takes place on the “inside” - in the home, and not outside the home; but although the home is the main place for the Jewish woman who is a wife and mother, we know that in the end of the day, women are not found all day in their house; they go out of the home, and certainly in the times we live, this is the case.

But there is one day of the year where a large part of the Jewish people is not outside, and they are found inside, in the home. It is the one time of the year where we can truly apply this verse of **כל כבודה בת מלך פנימה**. It is not a coincidence we have a day of the year in which we are not found in the outside world and that this day happens to be Yom Kippur. It is because the underlying essence of Yom Kippur is **הצנוע לכת עם אלוֹקֵיךָ**, “*Walk secretly with your G-d*” - to be in a place that is *tzniyus*.

But we must clearly know the following: *Tzniyus* is not just about covering the body. Being physically covered is certainly the main part of *tzniyus* in the *external* sense, but the *inner essence* (the *pnimiyus*) of *tzniyus* takes place inside us, in the depths of our heart. That is where our *tzniyus* is accessed.

There is a deep place in our heart which is covered and hidden from the rest of the world – and from ourselves. What is hidden from? It is hidden from our own selves, because it is so hidden. But when Yom Kippur comes, our hearts are opened, our *pnimiyus* is opened, and this inner place of *tzniyus* in our hearts becomes revealed to us.

During the rest of the year, we are experiencing the outer layers of our souls, and that is where we are seeing our life from. The inner place in our heart is hidden from us. But on Yom Kippur, the inner place in the heart can be revealed to us. Yom Kippur is a time where we are purified, where our hearts are purified to serve Hashem, and this purity of the heart means that the inner place in our heart is revealed to us. This means that on Yom Kippur, each person, on his/her own individual level, can reach the innermost place in himself/herself.

133 Editor's Note: It is well-known that the Jewish woman is compared to the moon, which experiences cycles of renewal. It seems that the Rav is drawing a correlation, that just as the moon is more modest on Rosh HaShanah by being covered over, so is the avodah of a Jewish woman to become more modest, with the beginning of Rosh HaShanah.

Teshuvah – Entering Deeper Into Ourselves

This is also the depth of doing *teshuvah*. When doing *teshuvah*, one needs to enter into deeper places in himself, in his/her heart. The normal feelings and emotions which we experience during the rest of the year are not our innermost feelings we reach when doing *teshuvah*.

Teshuvah is supposed to make us think and reflect, and to feel deeper places in ourselves, and from there, we come to feel true regret for any wrongdoings we have done and to make earnest resolutions to improve in the coming year and be better. The normal emotions which we have during the rest of the year are not the same emotions which enter us into *teshuvah* on Yom Kippur. The day of Yom Kippur reveals to us a more inner and hidden place in ourselves.

Preparing Ourselves On Erev Yom Kippur

It is recommended that on Erev Yom Kippur, one should sit with herself and prepare herself to enter into a deeper place of herself. If one makes this preparation, she will find it easier on Yom Kippur to reach this deeper place in herself; to reach deeper and truer feelings in herself. This is the deep place in ourselves where we can experience **הצנע לכת עם אלוֹקִיךָ**.

Thus, **הצנע לכת עם אלוֹקִיךָ**, the concept of *tzniyus*\modesty, includes both external and internal modesty. The external aspect of modesty is to be dressed appropriately, but even more so, it includes being modest about ourselves: not to praise ourselves to others, so that we keep a low profile. Yet even this is still within the *external* aspect of *tzniyus*; it is not yet the *inner essence* of *tzniyus*.

Tzniyus In The 21st Century

In our generation, we can see that the main emphasis of *tzniyus* today is being placed on the external aspects of *tzniyus*, such as how to dress appropriately, etc. Something is greatly missing from the *tzniyus* in today's times, and it is because the essence behind *tzniyus* is usually missing.

We are often grappling with the external issues of *tzniyus* [appropriate dress and etc.], but these are just the *results* of a deeper issue. Sometimes we succeed in strengthening the external aspects of *tzniyus* and sometimes we are less successful. But what we really need is to build our power of *tzniyus* from its inner root that it is based on: “Walk secretly with your G-d.”

Finding The Essence of Tzniyus In Ourselves – On Yom Kippur

It is written, “And I will dwell amongst them,” and Chazal teach that this verse means that Hashem dwells in each person's heart. That means that each and every Jew contains in the depths of his\her a hidden place which he can enter, where the *Shechinah* resides and he can feel a deep closeness with Hashem. That place in our heart is where we are meant to enter on Yom Kippur.

Practically speaking, as we *daven* to Hashem on Yom Kippur, we need to try to enter into a deeper place in ourselves. We should do so calmly and slowly, and not try to strain ourselves to get there. But we should try to get there and concentrate on this, slowly and calmly: to reach a deeper place in ourselves, to feel a clearer perception of truths, to reach truer and purer feelings there.

Through the *teshuvah* of Yom Kippur that enables us to be purified by Hashem, we can feel deeper feelings on Yom Kippur than the rest of the year, where we enter into the hidden place in ourselves of “*Walk secretly with your G-d.*” This hidden place in ourselves is where we can truly feel that we are “with” Hashem.

In Summary

So let us remember, that the external aspect of *tzniyus*, of how we must appear and dress, is but one part of our *avodah* in *tzniyus*. Along with it we must awaken in ourselves, for just a few moments, a truer and purer feeling for *tzniyus*. The time to work on this is especially Yom Kippur, where we have a special opportunity to awaken in ourselves to attain a slightly deeper and truer feeling, towards *tzniyus*.

In Conclusion

We have seen, with *siyata d'shmaya*, briefly, the five parts of *teshuvah*.

As mentioned in the beginning, one cannot try to work on all of these ideas at once. That will be too difficult. One should instead choose to focus on one of these paths to *teshuvah*, and those who merit it can work on two of the paths. Choose one of these five paths, the one that you feel speaks to you, the one that is closest to your heart.

With some people, a certain path will feel close to home, and other paths will not. With others, a different path is the one that feels closer, and not the others. Each person is different when it comes to this, because not all souls are equal. Therefore, sometimes a person will hear a certain path and it will speak to him very much, whereas another person will connect with it less.

So, sit down after this and reflect: Which one of these five paths mentioned is the one that speaks to you the most? Which is the closest one for you to work on?

All of these paths are based on the words of our Sages. I emphasize that they are the words of the Sages, and they are not my own. This idea that the word “*teshuvah*” stands for these five verses is a concept mentioned in many of the words of our Sages. Choose at least one of these five paths to *teshuvah* to work on, at least during these last few days of *teshuvah* leading up to Yom Kippur. And surely on Yom Kippur itself, you should try to touch upon one of these paths of *teshuvah*.

These days of *teshuvah* are not just days to *daven* more. We need to aim to make some kind of small change for the better, to be able to live a bit more spiritually. This change, when worked upon, will have a positive effect on you for the rest of the year as well.

May Hashem let us merit together, with *siyata d'shmaya*, to become elevated, to grow, each person on his own level, according to his or her own soul. May we merit to grow more and more, to merit to improve, even a little bit more improved, in the coming year.

If one merits to become even more improved, that is wonderful, but even for those who don't, the least we can each aim for is to grow just a little bit more. This little bit of improvement can enable us to ask Hashem for another year of life, that it should at least be more elevated and more spiritual than the year before.

May we all merit, together, to be sealed in the *sefer* of the *tzaddikim*, all of *Klal Yisrael*, for a *gmar chasimah tovah*.

3.9 | *The Growth of Yomim Noraim – Before and After*¹³⁴

We have the festivals and the high holy days of the year, in which we feel more elevated during the rest of the year. These are times where we go above our normal bounds. Most people are not able to live with that level all year round.

When it comes to the festivals of Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot, not everyone identifies with the holiness of these times. But when it comes *Yomim Noraim*, when Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur are approaching, every Jew feels a bit of elation during these times. It is brought in *halacha* that one should be stringent not to eat bread baked by a non-Jew during this time of the year, even if he normally eats it during the rest of the year. In other words, these are times of the year where we act above our normal level.

A person might think: “Okay, so that is what we are supposed to do, then let’s be that way during the entire year as well, not just during *Yomim Noraim*.” If a person can do it for the rest of the year, that’s wonderful. But if he finds that he can’t, it shows that it is not his normal level to act like this.

Another example: a person stays up learning the whole night of Shavuot. He might feel, “Why can’t I do this during the rest of the year as well?” He is full of idealistic aspirations. Then he *davens Shacharis* and *Mussaf* and struggles to stay awake, he gets back to his house and he falls upon his bed, and sleeps for several hours until the meal. That shows that he can’t stay up a whole night learning for more than one night a year.

We see from this that the high levels we live with on the festivals cannot be the exact way to live during the rest of the year. It is good for the time being, but it is not a basis of *avodah* for the rest of the year.

On the festivals, there is a special spiritual light that helps us reach higher levels on the festival, but after the festival is over, the light is gone. It can certainly inspire a person to reach deeper into himself during the rest of the year, but he definitely cannot be on the level of the festivals during the rest of the year.

When a person doesn’t understand this point, he does not know he really is and what his actual capabilities are. It is not a mere mistake; he will have a total misunderstanding of who he really is, and it will cause him to become conceited, as he tries to work with levels that are way beyond what he can do right now. It can cause much confusion in his soul. It also breeds delusions.

Here is another example. On Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, a person *davens* a longer *Shemoneh Esrei*. He realizes how wonderful this is and he would like to do the same during the rest of the year as well. He will find that sometimes, when his soul feels more opened, he will be able to

¹³⁴ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-fire-005-knowing-your-capabilities>

do this. But he will find himself in times where his soul is closed, and it feels to stressful to *daven* a long *Shemoneh Esrei*.

The Two Sides of Our Life: Seder (Routine) and Dilug (Jumping)

So one must know his natural capabilities and his normal schedule, which is his point of *seder* (order) in his soul, and he must also be aware that there is a point of *kefitzah* (jumping) (or *dilug* (skipping)) in himself, where he can jump/skip levels at times. One must learn how to act when he's in a period of *dilug*: the rules of *dilug* are different than the rules of one's regular *seder*.

When one properly understands the nature of *dilug* in the soul, he has a better understanding of his times of elation, and these times are then given more orderliness.

How To View The Festivals

Many people have a hard time with the day after Yom Tov, because it can feel like falling from a high spiritual plateau, back down to the mundane, daily routine of life. A person might have the same feeling when it's a day after a wedding or after a time where he felt very inspired, where he felt that he had soared to higher spiritual levels. The next day, he finds himself back to normal, mundane routine of life, and the transition feels disturbing. That's one kind of spiritual pain a person might feel.

But there is a deeper kind of spiritual pain which is experienced by those who are very serious about their *Avodas Hashem*: they have a difficulty with their very times of spiritual elevation that they experience on Yom Tov. Thus, they are inwardly apprehensive about an approaching Yom Tov. Why? Because they are deeply aware that they are entering sublime territory way above their normal reach.

(The truth is that if a person views Yom Tov as a "gift from Hashem", as it is called, he won't have this problem, but when one does not have this understanding, he instead views Yom Tov as a 'high spiritual state' that he must enter, and naturally, he is afraid of such a thing.)

There's another way to live that's entirely different which would solve the above problem. Anyone who is serious about his *Avodas Hashem* needs to deal with this point somehow: We must know that the spiritual light which is present during the festivals gives us the power to carry over a little bit of into the rest of the year as well.

Although we cannot be on the level of the festivals during the rest of the year, the festivals are able to deepen our already existing qualities and raise the bar a bit. It is not coming to make us change our *avodah* entirely. Rather, it's enlightening us to further pursue and deepen our already existing spiritual levels.

The Festivals Can Strengthen Your Torah Learning

For example, if a person is immersed in Torah during the rest of the year, the festivals can help a person raise the bar in his Torah learning.

It is not only Shavuot and Simchas Torah which gives a person a stronger power of learning Torah. The festival of Succos can also do it; when you read *Koheles* on Succos, you can realize how futile the world is (as *Koheles* says), and that in turn strengthens your desire for Torah learning.

On Pesach, which is the time of our freedom, we can realize the statement of *Chazal* that “there is no free person except a person who learns Torah.” The festivals come to strengthen a point in you that’s already active. Rosh HaShanah and Purim can also accomplish it.

That is the sensible way to view the festivals, but most people have a different attitude about it. When we enter a high spiritual time, such as *Yomim Noraim*, we realize that it’s a higher level than our normal place, and can feel like an exile. It makes a person feel like he’s imprisoned from his regular routine.

So not only is it hard to deal with the “fall” after *Yomim Noraim* ends; it’s hard to enter in the first place, because it feels imprisoning, for we are entering higher levels.

Frustration On Simchas Torah (and afterwards)

Here is another simple example. 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.

Lessening The Frustration

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 is going to 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.

The point is to become aware that there's a part of ourselves that can jump to higher levels, and that this doesn't mean we need to stay at those higher places we jump to. With this mindset, when the festivals end, instead of feeling a great fall from our level which makes us feel like we've fallen flat on the ground, we can 'fall' away lightly from it, floating gently downwards from it, and then the impact of the fall will be much less.

This concept is not only applicable with the festivals. It is an inner perspective towards living life, which applies to all aspects of spiritual growth.