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יום כיפור

Part 1: Preparing Ourselves for Yom Kippur

Part 2: The Most Important Idea to Focus On

FROM THE SHIURIM OF

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YOM KIPPUR

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AN OPEN BRACHAH TO ALL

We would like to first express our gratitude to Hakadosh Baruch Hu for all of His chessed over the past year, and for His chessed, so far, for this coming year. Baruch Hashem, that we have arrived at this juncture in time. We are still standing on our two feet. I know quite a few people who are not so strong on their two feet at my age, so I am very thankful to Hashem for that.

I am very thankful to Hashem for having had a wonderful Rosh Hashanah. I want to wish everybody to be zocheh to a Yom Hakippurim that will inspire you, elevate you, and arouse you to do teshuvah - so that you will be zocheh to change your life, your year, and everything connected to you.

SET ASIDE FOR TESHUVAH

The Ramchal, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, in his sefer Derech Hashem writes that the inyan of Yom Hakippurim is that Hashem prepared a day for His nation, Am Yisrael, on which teshuvah is easily accepted.[1] Our sins are ready to be wiped away. Through this, Hashem will fix up all the kilkulim that were caused and remove the darkness that descended upon the world through our sins. He will return us to a madreigah of kedushah and closeness to Hashem, from which we had become distanced. On this day, there is a spiritual light that gets brighter and brighter, accomplishing all of these wonderful things.

Yom Hakippurim is called Yom Hakadosh. There is a pasuk in the Navi that says, "likdosh Hashem mechubad."[2] Normally, when you read that pasuk, you think it refers to Shabbos. But Chazal tell us it refers to Yom Hakadosh.[3] Why? Because there is no achilah - no eating or drinking. Instead, the Torah says to honor it with

[1] דרך ה', חלק רביעי, במצות הזמנים אות ה' – יום הכיפורים: אמנם ענין יוה"כ הוא שהנה הכין האדון ב"ה לישראל יום א' שבו תהיה התשובה קלה להתקבל והעונות קרובים לימחות דהיינו לתקן כל הקלקולים שנעשו על ידיהם ולהסיר כל החשך שנתגבר על ידיהם ולהשיב השבים אל מדריגת הקדושה והקורבה אליו ית' שנתרחקו ממנה ע"י חטאתיהם. והנה ביום זה מאיר אור שבכחו נשלם כל זה הענין ואמנם הוא אור שלקבל אותו צריך שישמרו ישראל מה שנצטוו ליום זה ובפרט ענין העינוי שעליה מתנתקים מן הגופניות ניתוק גדול ומתעלים במקצת אל בחי' המלאכים ושאר כל פרטי הדברים כפי פרטי התיקון:

[2] אִם תָּשִׁיב מִשַּׁבָּת רַגְלֶךָ עֲשׂוֹת חֲפָצֶךָ בְּיוֹם קָדְשִׁי וְקָרָאתָ לַשַּׁבָּת עֹנֶג לִקְדוֹשׁ ה' מְכֻבָּד וְכִבַּדְתּוֹ מֵעֲשׂוֹת דְּרָכֶיךָ מִמְּצוֹא חֶפְצְךָ וְדַבֵּר דָּבָר (ישעיהו נ"ח:י"ג)

[3] שבת קי"ט ע"א: אֲמַר לֵיהּ רֵישׁ גְּלוּתָא לְרַב הַמְנוּנָא: מַאי דִּכְתִיב "וְלִקְדוֹשׁ ה' מְכוּבָּד"? אֲמַר לֵיהּ: זֶה יוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים, שֶׁאֵין בּוֹ לֹא אֲכִילָה וְלֹא שְׁתִיָּה, אֶמְרָה תּוֹרָה: כַּבְּדֵהוּ בְּכָסוּת נְקִיָּה.

clean clothing. Even though Shabbos is also called a holy day (Shabbos kodesh), Yom HaKippurim is uniquely referred to as the Yom Hakadosh.

What is the implication of the word kedushah? Kedushah means set apart - something different, something that stands above and beyond. We have to know that Yom Hakippurim is completely different from all the other 364 days of the year. The day itself stands apart and is not subjugated to the standard rules of the world.

FREE OF THE YETZER HARA

You have to know that Yom HaKippurim stands on its own. Nothing in this world happens that is not based on the ratzon of Hashem. Hashem runs His world according to an orderly mahalach with natural rules, but there is one day that is totally unique: Yom Hakippurim.

What makes this day so different? In Parshas Acharei Mos, the Torah tells us that the Kohen Gadol would enter the Kodesh Hakodashim on Yom Hakippurim to atone for Klal Yisrael. The verse states: ואל יבא בכל עת אל הקדש. The rest of the year, the Kohen Gadol was forbidden from entering the Holy of Holies.

The Kli Yakar explains why: because of the sins of Klal Yisrael.[4] When Klal Yisrael is not in a state of ultimate purity, the kohen who represents them does not merit to see the Pnei HaShechinah, the presence of Hashem. But there is one day a year that the Kohen Gadol could enter: Yom Hakippurim.

On this day, all of Klal Yisrael are equated to malachei hashareis, existing above time itself. Time does not rule over them. It is as if this day is not part of the standard calendar year; it stands entirely alone. On Yom Hakippurim, we are all granted entry into the corridor to stand before the Shechinah.

The Chasam Sofer writes in his drashos that on Yom HaKippurim, a person's neshamah and guf are automatically purified far more than during the rest of the year.[5] He uses this principle to explain various teachings in the Gemara. In creation, the Satan's power becomes diminished on this day. The ability of the Satan to challenge and prosecute exists for only 364 days of the year.

[4] ויקרא ט״ז ב׳ ד״ה ואל יבא וכו׳: אומַר אֲנִי שֶׁטַּעַם אִסּוּר בִּיאָתוֹ שֶׁמָּה תְּלוּי בְּחַטַּאת הָעָם, כִּי עֲוֹנוֹתֵיהֶם מַבְדִּילִין בֵּינָם לְבֵין אֱלֹהֵיהֶם, וְקִלְקוּלָם מוֹנֵעַ גַּם בִּיאַת הַכֹּהֵן, כִּי אִשְׁמַת הָעָם תְּלוּיָה בּוֹ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב (שמות כח א): ״וְאַתָּה הַקְרֵב אֵלֶיךָ אֶת אַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ מִתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל״, הוֹרָה שֶׁלֹּא זָכָה לְקָרִיבָה זוֹ כִּי אִם מִתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וּכְשֶׁיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֵינָן זוֹכִין גַּם הַכֹּהֵן הַתָּלוּי בָּהֶם אֵינוֹ זוֹכֶה לִרְאוֹת פְּנֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה, כִּי אִם בְּיוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים שֶׁכָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל נִמְשָׁלוּ בְּיוֹם הַהוּא לְמַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת שֶׁהֵם לְמַעְלָה מִן הַזְּמַן וְאֵין הַזְּמַן שׁוֹלֵט בָּהֶם, עַל כֵּן דּוֹמֶה יוֹם קְדוֹשׁ זֶה כְּאִלּוּ אֵינוֹ מִכְּלַל הָעֵת וְהַזְּמַן, כִּי כָּל יְמוֹת הַשָּׁנָה בִּכְלַל הָעֵת, דְּהַיְנוּ הַזְּמַן, חוּץ מִיּוֹם זֶה.

[5] חתם סופר דרשות לשבת שובה ח"א טז ע"א

Do you know what the gematria of HaSatan is? HaSatan equals 364, which hints that "the Satan" only has license to operate for 364 days a year, leaving the 365th day - Yom Kippur - completely free from his influence.[6]

In other words, on Yom HaKippurim, a person could do teshuvah sheleimah and come close to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He has no impediments.

Think about how incredible this is: you have no spiritual obstacles on Yom Kippur! What you can reach on this day is unlimited. But what is the obvious question? Why don't some people soar? Why does it seem like the yetzer hara still holds people in its embrace on Yom Hakippurim, even when the Satan is inactive?

Everyone is free from the Satan on Yom Kippur - he does not operate at all. So why is it that when the doors are wide open, some people still do not draw closer to Hashem? Nobody is stopping us at the entrance. Everyone can step right in: "Walk through the doors and bask in the light of Hashem. Free yourself. Shake off the dust. Pay off all your spiritual debts." We all have accumulated debts throughout the year from places where we slipped or failed to act appropriately.

So why doesn't everyone do teshuvah if the Satan has no koach on Yom Kippur?

A ZMAN WITH KEDUSHAH

The sefarim explain that there were three times a year when the nation was mechuyav to travel to Yerushalayim to the Beis HaMikdash. What was the purpose of going there? To experience the Shechinah. As the Gemara says, everyone who went was sho'ev (absorbed) Ruach HaKodesh.[7] A simple Jew could walk into the Beis HaMikdash and walk out elevated with Ruach Hakodesh, yiras Shamayim, and spiritual strength for the entire year.

Yet on Yom Hakippurim - the holiest day of the year, elevated beyond all other moadim - everyone stayed home. Why was there no mitzvah to travel to the Beis HaMikdash on the day you would expect it most?!

The answer is that while on other yomim tovim you are inspired by the kedushah of the makom (the place), on Yom Hakippurim the inspiration comes directly from the zman (the time). Wherever you are, you have the ability to be elevated as if you were standing in the Mikdash itself.

[6] יומא כ ע״ב: השטן בגימטריא שס״ד, תלת מאה ושיתין וארבעה יומי אית ליה רשותא לאסטוני, ביומא דכיפורי לית ליה רשותא.

[7] ירושלמי סוכה ה:א: אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי. לָמָּה נִקְרָא שְׁמָהּ בֵּית שׁוֹאֲבָה. שֶׁמִּשָּׁם שׁוֹאֲבִים רוּחַ הַקּוֹדֶשׁ. עַל שֵׁם וּשְׁאַבְתֶּם מַיִם בְּשָׂשׂוֹן מִמַּעְיְנֵי הַיְשׁוּעָה.

On the Moadim, you need the holy space to receive that elevation. On Motzei Yom Hakippurim, even after experiencing the day like a malach, when we recite Shema, we return to saying Baruch Shem quietly because the unique sanctity of the time has concluded.

However, when Yom Kippur begins, even before we have received full kapparah, we recite Baruch Shem kevod malchuso le'olam va'ed out loud, just like the malachim. The moment the day arrives, you are elevated to that status. That is why a person should ensure they are in the beis haknesses on time - you do not want to miss that moment of elevation.

But there is a condition: you must do teshuvah. If you do not prepare and do teshuvah before Yom Hakippurim, then even though the yetzer hara is inactive, you will continue running on autopilot and default to your year-round habits.

THE DANGER OF US BEING ON AUTOPILOT

Yesterday, I flew on a plane - a bathtub with a propeller in front of it, more like it. The plane is taking off. We're going up in the air, we are at five hundred feet, a thousand feet, fifteen hundred feet, two thousand feet. I'm looking out the window and thinking, shreck, we are two thousand feet above the ground. What would be if this tiny little "bathtub" decides to wobble? And it was wobbling, trust me. I said, "Hashem, I'm in Your hands. Being on the ground is not any safer than in this bathtub, because Hashem, I'm always in Your hands." I said, "ישב בסתר עליון בצל שדי יתלונן, I closed my eyes and I said, "Ein Od Milvado." Then I hear the captain say, "Okay, now we're going to autopilot." Until then, he was driving the plane. Suddenly the autopilot takes over and it was a breeze from there. The pilot could read, he was reading things. He was looking things up. He was studying about the plane. He didn't have to be maysiach daas.

So sometimes a person is so in touch with the yetzer hara, that he's running on navigation, he's running on autopilot. In order for Yom Kippur to have a shaychus to you, you know what has to happen? You have to be present for Yom Kippur. You have to come prepared for Yom Kippur. The fact that you're standing and breathing on the tenth day of Tishrei does not mean you are present for the Yom Hakadosh. It doesn't work like that. In order for you to be shayech and to be present, you have to have come prepared. You have to have "taken a shower" beforehand, which means, you have to have done teshuvah. You have to have shaken the dirt or loosened the dirt from upon yourself.

You can't be mekabel anything when they're giving stuff out if you don't hold your hands out to receive it. If you're not present when they're giving out the presents, you're not going to get anything.

You have to know that on Yom Kippur, there's such a degree of ahava from Hashem. There's a degree of hiskarvus to Hashem like you can't imagine. On Yom Kippur, we experience an ocean of mercy, but you've got to be prepared to be mekabel it. Not everybody's the same. Not everybody has the same kochos.

I've mentioned previously Rav Yisrael Salanter's words that there is no greater day, no greater simchah, no greater Yom Tov than the Yom Tov of Yom Hakippurim. And the tiniest elevation that a person elevates himself or prepares himself could make his Yom Kippur extraordinary. But if he doesn't have that little bit, he doesn't invest that little bit, then he can't be mekabel all the good things Yom Hakippurim has to offer.

PREPARE FOR YOM KIPPUR

Who doesn't want to be spared from tzaros? Who doesn't want to make it through to the other side of next year healthy? Who doesn't want to make it by having nachas from his children? Who doesn't want to make it by having a shidduch? Who doesn't want to make it on Yom Kippur, the day of rachmanus. All you have to do is give Yom Kippur some value. You have to value Yom Kippur. You have to come prepared for Yom Kippur.

And the way you come prepared is by saying, "Hashem, I want to become better," and you tell Hashem in what areas you will become better.

Now a person operates in many dimensions. You're a human being. Human beings are very very complex. But a human being is mashpia [has an impact] in three ways: his machshavah, his dibbur, and his maasim. You don't operate through your toes. You move your toes, you move your ankles, you move a lot of parts of you. There's a lot of parts in the ankle. But you don't affect the world with your toes. The way you affect and are mashpia on the world is through your machshavah [thoughts], through your dibbur [words], and through your maasim, actions. And when you want to do teshuvah, you have to think, and say to Hashem. "Hashem, I'm sorry that my machshava was not aligned with Your will. I would like my machshavah to be aligned with Your will."

NOT TO THINK NEGATIVELY OF PARENTS

A very common issue people bring up is friction with their parents. They seek counsel from therapists and rabbonim, but

often miss the core perspective: everything comes from Hashem, including our parents. I reminded someone recently, "You have no right to harbor negative thoughts about your parents." She replied, "But my parents act crazy." I said, "Then you should certainly have compassion rather than negativity. If someone is unwell or lacking capacity, it is a nebech - we should feel empathy for them. If someone suffered from a condition like Tourette's syndrome, you would view them with pity."

Tourette's syndrome brings immense difficulty and embarrassment. Someone sitting in a Beis Medrash might suddenly experience uncontrollable physical tics, movements, or vocalizations that they cannot stop. In severe cases, very inappropriate words may burst out involuntarily. I've witnessed this, it's awful. Whatever is in their mind comes right out, out-loud. Usually, they either run out of the Beis Medrash or a public setting where they do this, or they're escorted out. Observers who do not understand the condition might react with anger, not realizing the person has no control over it. It is a very tragic situation. The one who has the syndrome can't help it.

You have to realize that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the One who makes people sick. Are you angry at that person? No, you feel bad. Let's say your father is sick. Let's say your mother is sick, because you diagnosed them as such. I tell a lot of people: "I'm not sure if you're not sick. How do you know? Are you a therapist? Are you a psychologist?" Or, you told the psychologist what your mother does, so he told you that your mother has a personality disorder or behavioral problems or mental problems, and so on and so forth. You can't judge somebody or rule on something without seeing somebody and getting a professional medical assessment.

Maybe you have a problem. I said to that person, "Did Hashem give you this test? You can't hate your mother. You are not allowed to hate any Jew, especially a Jew who is not well, either physically or emotionally, etc. I know you're probably disappointed, but that doesn't make it right."

THINKING THE WAY HASHEM WANTS YOU TO

This is what you have to think of on Yom Kippur: "Hashem, is my mind aligned with You? Or, do I think when I choose to think, about what I choose to think, whenever I choose to think?"

Do you know how many parts of people's minds are thinking about negativity about others? "I hate that lady. I hate that man. I hate that person. I can't stand this person. I can't stand that person." You're angry at your brother, you're angry at your sister. That's called a filthy, disgusting mind. That's what it's called.

Now you're not crazy. You're doing it by choice. Most people who think those thoughts are doing so by choice. And I'm not even up to the good thoughts yet. I'm just talking about the simple bad thoughts that we think.

And then people speak. They use their mouths and they say what they want, when they want, and how they want. They have no inhibitions.

And then they act out in deeds maasim the very same way.

What kind of maasim? Whatever they want to do. They come when they want, they go when they want, they do things however they want, and there's no responsibility. They think the world is hefker. In order to get teshuvah, to get kaparah from Yom Hakippurim, you have to make amends. You have to make peace with Hashem.

You have to say to Hashem: "I know what I have to do." On Yom Kippur you always aim high. Always decide what's the high point that I need to be at. Maybe I can't be at that point right now, but I know, Hashem, I have to be at the high point. Now Hashem, I'm going to start low and work my way up.

You set the goal, and even if you're not at that high point yet, you plan to work your way up. That's called being present on Yom Kippur. And that presence will bring you to the goal of Yom Kippur. That presence will bring you to having tremendous kapparah.

FREEDOM AND TZAAR

I look through my life and I've been involved with quite a few people. And the amount of tzaros that people have in their life, in their personal lives, is tremendous. People who act crazy. Husbands who act crazy, wives who act crazy, kids who act crazy. Tremendous craziness. Tremendous tzaar. It's mind-blowing. Why is it like that? You know why? Because when you choose to act in the ways that you want, and when you think you're a free person and you could do whatever you want, however you want, whenever you want, then, Hashem sends you people who behave like that in your life. And if you do teshuvah, then you have shaychus to Yom Hakippurim.

THE REASON TO DO TESHUVAH

Now the teshuvah has to come not because you want to have a peaceful year. The Gemara in Megillah asks, why do we ask for teshuvah in the Shemoneh Esrei after we ask for daas?[8] We first ask for daas, that's the most important thing, knowledge, intellect, understanding. The second thing you ask for is teshuvah. The

[8] מגילה יז ע"ב: וּמָה רָאוּ לוֹמַר תְּשׁוּבָה אַחַר בִּינָה — דִּכְתִיב: "וּלְבָבוֹ יָבִין וְשָׁב וְרָפָא לוֹ".

Gemara says why is it like that? The Gemara says וּמָה רָאוּ לוֹמַר תְּשׁוּבָה אַחַר בֵּינָה, and it quotes a pasuk from Yeshayahu.[9]

It says in the pasuk, "Ulevavo yavin - your mind should understand," and then, "v'shav - you do teshuvah," and then "v'rafa lo - you're going to have healing," you're going to be better. This is mindboggling! Teshuvah is not because you want to save yourself from getting whacked around. Teshuvah is not because you want to have a peaceful year. Teshuvah is not because you want to have some menuchas hanefesh. That's not why you do teshuvah.

You know why you do teshuvah? Because you've come to an understanding, you've come to some daas. Now you understand and your mind grasps that: "Hashem, I want to be close to You, I have to be close to You, I need to be close to You. I should align myself with Your behavior." That is called using your mind to come to teshuvah. And when you come to that havanah, that understanding, and you want now to do teshuvah because of that, then it's bingo.

Doing teshuvah just to save yourself and get yourself to have a little menuchas hanefesh today, maybe get a shidduch, maybe have a baby, maybe a child should get a shidduch, that's not the way to get that teshuvah. That's not called u'levavo yavin. You have to have havanas halev and then v'rafa lo. So this Yom Kippur, you're going to think to yourselves: "Hashem, You're my Melech. השם מלך השם מלך השם ימלוך לעולם ועד. Hashem, You're going to take care of me. You took care of me until now, Hashem, You've given me intellect to grasp Your greatness, to understand and to have some awareness of who You are, Hashem, and therefore it behooves me to align my behavior, my thinking, my talking, my actions with Your ratzon, with Your will."

PREPARING OURSELVES AND OUR MINDS TO RETURN

And if you do that, you're going to be zocheh to a tremendous Yom Hakadosh. A tremendous year. It is entirely possible for a person to actually control his thoughts and ask himself whether my thoughts are allowed or not allowed. Am I allowed to think like that? You know how many people have non-kosher thoughts, hashkafos? They have bad hashkafos. They decide, "It's fine if I do this," but it's a treife thought. That's called ולא תתרו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם. That's called straying after your mind. You can't do that. You should not do that. And you're responsible for that if you do it.

So let us be zoche. Let's prepare ourselves, prepare our minds and return to Hashem, so that on the day that we're free from

[9] ישעיהו ו:י: הַשְׁמֵן לֵב־הָעָם הַזֶּה וְאָזְנָיו הַכְבֵּד וְעֵינָיו הָשַׁע פֶּן־יִרְאֶה בְעֵינָיו וּבְאָזְנָיו יִשְׁמָע וּלְבָבוֹ יָבִין וְשָׁב וְרָפָא לוֹ׃

the yetzer hara, Yom Kippur, we'll be free to soar, to fly as high as possible.

Hashem can see what's in your heart, and Hashem knows if you really want to come back and you really want to get close to Him, and you want to have a shaychus to Him. And if you do as we have learned, Hashem will definitely help you to accomplish your goals.

Have an amazing and uplifting Yom Tov!

Part 2: The Most Important Idea to Focus On

This is going to be the last shiur for this zman, שנת תשפ"ב. I want to extend my wishes to all of you that you should all be zocheh to a gmar chasima tova. You should all be zocheh to key in to the process of teshuva on Yom Kippurim and be zocheh for yourselves and for your families to menuchas hanefesh, menuchas haguf, simchas hachayim, health, parnassah, v'chol hatov.

DON'T MISS THE CHANCE

Teshuva's not that hard, and it's for sure not hard to do on Yom Kippurim. If you don't do teshuva on Yom Kippurim, there's no word to describe that folly. It's a gold mine, and being mekabel to do better, to put a positive spin on it, is what we're going to be talking about today.

People make an error and think that the main part of teshuva is sur meira - to turn away from the bad. There are two parts: there is sur meira and there is asei tov - to do good. They think that the main emphasis is on cleaning up the past, and they don't realize that the main avoda is really asei tov. A person has to know that by undertaking to do good, to better yourself, to be mechazek yourself in Torah and avoda, that's the best and the most powerful way of sur meira.

IMPROVE IN TORAH AND CHESED

It says in the pasuk, שובה ישראל עד ה' אלהיך - Return, O Yisrael, to Hashem, Your G-d (Hosea 14:2). How do you do that? By asei tov, by doing good things, by knowing what Hashem values. Without Torah, a person can't know what he has to change. He can't know how he has to change.

And Torah is the antidote for the yetzer hara. The Gemara asks, "What's tachlis chochmah, what's the purpose of having wisdom? Teshuvah and ma'asim tovim." Wisdom is meant to bring somebody

to do teshuvah and good deeds.[10]

A common question I ask people when I see them is, “Are you a smart fellow?” It’s amazing how many people will tell me, “I’m very smart.” And I say, “Have you improved yourself in the last year? Are you a better version of yourself now than you once were?” They think and they say, “About the same.” Then you’re not a wise person.

And I always tell them the story with Rav Gifter that I was zocheh to witness: There was a man who showed up at Ma’ariv one Motza’ei Shabbos in Telz Yeshiva. He stood out, wearing a white suit and a paper yarmulke. He needed to say Kaddish. And I went over to him after Ma’ariv and I said, “Shalom Aleichem, A gut vuch. Where are you coming from?” I hadn’t seen him the whole Shabbos. He said he was coming from the hotel down the hill. I said, “What was going on there?” So he said, “There was a Mensa weekend.” I said, “What is that?” He said, “Mensa is an organization of geniuses. To qualify, you have to have a very high IQ, you take constant tests, and you can move up; there are all kinds of rules to being a Mensa member, and I’m a certified Mensa member.” So I said, “So how smart would you say you are?” So he said, “I’m a genius.” He didn’t tell me he was humble, but he said he’s a genius. I said, “Really? I would like to introduce you to the head of the Yeshiva, his name is Rav Gifter. He’s also a genius.” I said, “Come, let me introduce you.” We walked outside; Rav Gifter was already in the hall of the Yeshiva, and at that time he was using a walker. We walked over and I said, “Uncle, a gut vuch, I would like to introduce you to this fellow who’s from Mensa.”

He said, “What is that?” I said, ”That’s an organization for geniuses.” He said, “Are you a genius?” The man said, “Yes, I am.” So Rav Gifter asked him, “Do you know of God?” He said, “I have my doubts.” He said, “Sir, you shall excuse me. You’re no genius, you’re far from a genius! By us, every three-year-old knows about Hashem. A gut vuch!”

It was like a bomb.

CHOCHMA LEADS TO TESHUVA AND MAASIM TOVIM

Chochmah has no value on its own. Somebody called me recently to tell me about somebody else - what kind of big chacham the person is. He’s a chacham, the son of a rav, doesn’t go to shul too much, doesn’t learn during the week, has a very pompous perspective of himself, doesn’t have to ask any shailos. He knows everything by himself; he thinks he’s smarter than most people.

[10] תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף יז/א, מרגלא בפומיה דרבא תכלית חכמה תשובה ומעשים טובים שלא יהא אדם קורא ושונה ובועט באביו ובאמו וברבו ובמי שהוא גדול ממנו בחכמה ובמנין שנאמר ראשית חכמה יראת ה' שכל טוב לכל עושיהם וכו'.

I said, “Is he smart?” The person told me, “Very smart.”

I’m going to tell you the truth: He’s as dumb as they come. And he probably has a narcissistic personality also if he can tell you that nonsense about how smart he is and how he doesn’t need any “tachlis chochma”. Do you know how to know if a person has chochma? If it leads to teshuva and maasim tovim.

Normally, you understand that there’s teshuva and there’s also maasim tovim - two separate things. Rav Yerucham Levovitz, the Mir mashgiach, said that they’re really one thing. What this means is that through maasim tovim, you can do teshuva; it brings you to do teshuva.

A wise man is someone who understands enough to throw himself into doing good. And if you do what’s good and do good deeds, throwing yourself into what Hashem calls good, that’s going to bring you to teshuva. If you take a look in Rabbeinu Yonah (Sha’arei Teshuva, 1:47), you’ll see that he says an amazing thing. He says one of the fundamental steps of teshuva is la’asos, to do, ve’lirdof, and to pursue pe’ulos hachesed, acts of chesed.[11]

How could that be? The Lakewood mashgiach said: You know what it says in Rabbeinu Yonah? That chesed is the shoresh of tov. The main area of good is chesed.

Naturally, a person doesn’t do chesed; he thinks about himself. If you want to do teshuva, start doing chesed.

By running after chesed, being mekabel to do chesed, your Yom Kippur will last. Rav Nosson Wachtfogel, the Lakewood mashgiach, used to say that a person has a much better chance to sustain his kabbalos on Yom HaKippurim if he’s mekabel to do good, rather than just being mekabel not to do bad. That’s a very important yesod.

Now, the opportunity we’re going to have on this Yom Kippur is something we can’t begin to imagine. To think for a whole Yom Kippur: “I want to do tov. I want to do good.” And you should specify what good you want to do: “I want to learn Torah better, because the antidote for the yetzer hara is Torah.” That’s what tov is.

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[11] הֶעקֵר הַשִּׁבְעָה עָשָׂר – לִרְדֹף פְּעֻלַּת הַחֶסֶד וְהָאֱמֶת: כְּעִנְיָן שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (משלי ט"ז:ו') בְּחֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת יְכֻפַּר עָוֹן וּבְיִרְאַת ה' סוּר מֵרָע. וְעִתָּה הִתְבּוֹנֵן בְּסוֹד הַמִּקְרָא הַזֶּה. כִּי הָאֱמֶת אִם הַחוֹטֵא לֹא שָׁב אֶל ה'. לֹא יִתְכַּפֵּר עֲוֹנוֹ בְּפֹעַל הַחֶסֶד. כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (דברים י':י"ז) אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִשָּׂא פָנִים וְלֹא יִקַּח שֹׁחַד. וּפָרַשׁ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ זִכְרוֹנָם לִבְרָכָה לֹא יִקַּח שֹׁחַד מִצְוָה. לְמָחל וּלְהַעֲבִיר עַל הֶעָוֹנוֹת. וְעוֹד אָמְרוּ כָּל הָאוֹמֵר הקב"ה וְתָרַן הוּא יִוָּתְרוּ חַיָּיו. אֲבָל מֵאֲרִיךְ אַפַּיִם. וְאִם לֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ. יְמֵד פְּעֻלָּתָם אֶל חִיקָם. אֲכָן זֶה שֶׁאָמַר שְׁלֹמֹה הַמֶּלֶךְ עָלָיו הַשָּׁלוֹם בְּחֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת יְכֻפַּר עָוֹן. עַל בַּעַל הַתְּשׁוּבָה דִּבֶּר. כִּי יֵשׁ עֲבֵרוֹת שֶׁהַתְּשׁוּבָה וְיוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים תּוֹלִין וְיִסּוּרִין מְמָרְקִין. כַּאֲשֶׁר יִתְבָּאֵר בְּשַׁעַר הָרְבִיעִי. וְהִנֵּה הַחֶסֶד יָגֵן בָּעֵד הַחוֹטֵא וְיִשָּׁמֵר עָלָיו מִן הַיִּסּוּרִין. בְּשֶׁגַּם הַצַּל יָצִיל מִן הַמָּוֶת. כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב (משלי י':ב') וּצְדָקָה תַּצִּיל מִמָּוֶת. וְעוֹד יֵשׁ עָוֹן וְהוּא עָוֹן חִלּוּל הַשֵּׁם. שֶׁהַתְּשׁוּבָה וְיִסּוּרִין תּוֹלִין וּמִיתָה מְמָרֶקֶת כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (ישעיהו כ"ב:י"ד) אִם יְכֻפַּר הֶעָוֹן הַזֶּה לָכֶם עַד תְּמֻתוּן. וְהִנֵּה כַּאֲשֶׁר הָאָדָם מְשַׁתְּדֵל לִתְמֹךְ בְּיַד הָאֱמֶת. וְיַעֲזֹר אֲחֵרִים וְיִתְעוֹרֵר בִּדְבָרָיו. וְהוֹפִיעַ אוֹרוֹ לְעֵינֵי בְּנֵי עַמּוֹ. וְיִתְחַזֵּק יְדֵי אַנְשֵׁי הָאֱמֶת. וְנַשָּׂא רֹאשָׁם. וְכִתּוֹת הַשֶּׁקֶר יִשָּׁפֵילֻם יַגִּיעַם עַד עָפָר. הִנֵּה אֵלֶּה דַּרְכֵי קְדוּשׁ ה'. וְהוֹד וְהָדָר לָאֱמוּנָתוֹ וַעֲבוֹדָתוֹ בָּעוֹלָם. וְעֹז וְתִפְאֶרֶת בְּמִקְדָּשׁ תּוֹרָתוֹ. עַל כֵּן בְּהַרְבּוֹת פְּעָלָיו לְקַדֵּשׁ אֶת ה' וּלְעוֹרֵר הָאֱמֶת לְהָכִין אוֹתוֹ וּלְסַעֲדוֹ. וְנִסְלַח לוֹ מֵעָוֹן הַחִלּוּל עִם הַתְּשׁוּבָה בְּשׁוּמוֹ הָאֱמֶת לְעֵמֶת אַשְׁמַת הַחִלּוּל. מִדַּת תְּשׁוּבָתוֹ נֶגֶד מִדַּת מְשׁוּבָתוֹ. זֶה בְּאוֹר בְּחֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת יְכֻפַּר עָוֹן.

Torah is chesed. Torah helps the whole world, it helps yourself, and it helps others. It's chesed, it's tzedaka, it's a lot of good deeds. A person has to know that by doing good, you emulate Hashem and you become close to Hashem.

TESHUVA MEANS COMING CLOSER TO HASHEM

And that's what teshuva is: becoming close to Hashem. Rav Nosson Wachtfogel, shared an amazing insight. There's a famous work called Pesikta Rabbasi. It says over there[12]: אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא to Klal Yisrael, אתם מתביישים לעשות תשובה? Are you embarrassed to do teshuva? Okay, Hashem said, I understand. Hareini shav rishon. I'll do teshuva first. You hear this? Shene'emar - he quotes a pasuk, ko amar Hashem, so said Hashem, hineini shav, I'm going to return. Does that make any sense? From what does Hashem do teshuva? What is Hashem doing teshuva for? But if you listened to what we spoke about last week, you would have heard what teshuva means: coming close to Hashem, creating a closer relationship with Hashem. Hiskarvus to Hashem - that's what teshuva is. When we sin, we distance ourselves from Hashem.

So Hashem says, "You're embarrassed... I'll make the first move. I'll let you know I'm available for you; I want to be a friend again." That's what a person on Yom Kippur has to be thinking throughout the day: "Hashem, I want to be a friend again. I want to be close to You again. I want to have a warm relationship with You. I want to do good."

Now, if a person comes to that awareness and thinks about that, that individual will be zoche to tremendous merits. Throughout Yom Kippur, your mind is going to wander. You should know that generally, teshuva is focused on the future. The first step of all teshuva is going forward: "I'm going to do better." I did something bad, I'm not going to deal with that right now. Let's move forward. Let's do good. That's the first step.

However, the one time a year you're allowed to think about the past is on Yom Kippur. Now it's a very dangerous game because a lot of people start to go down their memory lane of all the bad things that they did. The juicy bad things they did. The gishmak chatoim that they fell into.

And then all of a sudden, they forget they're in Yom Kippur. They think they're in the middle of the summer and think of the aveiros they did, what they saw, what they viewed, and what they acted upon. Hopefully, the kedusha of Yom Kippur will protect you, but you have to be very careful not to get lost in the memory lane.

[12] פסיקתא רבתי - פרשה מד ..."שובה ישראל עד ה, אלהיך": מצינו שמא לא היה אחריו שירחק אמר הריני שב לבן מלכים שהיה חולה אמר הרופא אם יאכל מן החפץ הוא מתרפא היה הבן מתיירא לאוכלו אומר לו אביו תדע שאינו מזיקך הריני אוכל ממנו כך אמר הקב"ה לישראל מתביישים אתם [לעשות] תשובה הריני שב ראשון שנאמר כה אמר ה' הנני שב (ירמיה ל' י"ח) ומה מי שאין לו חטא ולא סרחון חס ושלום אמר הנני שב בני אדם על אחת כמה וכמה צריכים לעשות תשובה ולבא אצל הקדוש ברוך הוא שובה ישראל עד ה' אלהיך:

Remember, if you're going down memory lane, just to say, "Hashem, I'm really sorry." And if you're not really sorry and you get yourself all worked up... You know, I had a person who became a baal teshuva, and he always liked to talk about the good old days. He had very little regret for the things that he did. He enjoyed life. He was definitely a guy who knew the definition of olam hazeh, and he lived it to the max. So it was extremely difficult for him to feel real regret. I told him, "The first thing you should do is stop talking about it. Don't talk about all the 'good times'. Leave it in the past. Let it recede. And when you do teshuva, don't think about those things. Just look forward." Look forward and say, 'What am I going to be doing from now on?' You're not ready to have charata yet; you're not ready to have regrets. Hopefully, you'll get there soon."

A lot of people are not ready for that step yet; they think they're ready, but their Yom Kippur turns into a nightmare. Instead of doing teshuva, they end up with another pile of hirhurim ra'im, of evil thoughts.

So you don't go down memory lane unless you're certain that you're revolted, embarrassed, and ashamed of those previous maasim. The main thing you should say is, "Going forward, Hashem, I want to do good. I want to do what Your will is. I want to be mevatel myself to Your will."

People struggle in all areas of their life with Hashem. Tznius is a very famous one, a very common one. Hashem says: On Yom Kippur, try to be mekabel upon yourself asei tov.

You're going to learn more Torah. You can't get better without learning Torah, so you must learn Torah. Now, what if a guy does teshuva? He's worrying about lashon hara... He's standing on Yom Kippur and saying, "HaKadosh Baruch Hu, I'm be'emes sorry that I didn't control my mouth. I should've, I could've controlled it more than I have. Can You please give me another chance? Moving forward, I would like to work on it." And he says, "I'm not going to talk lashon hara." Nu, what happens a little while after Yom Kippur? The guy is talking lashon hara again!

And if you go to the guy and ask, "What are you doing?" the guy says, "I feel foolish." The yetzer hara tells him, "You never regretted talking lashon hara. You never regretted any of the aveiros you did." Now, is that teshuva or not teshuva?

If on Yom Kippur I say, "Hashem, I'm really sorry, truly sorry for what I did. Moving forward, I want to change my behavior," and I mean it right now - right now I wouldn't do the same aveira again, right now. But after a few day or a few weeks, we all know what usually happens. Is that teshuva?

FORGIVENESS REGARDLESS OF FUTURE AVEIRAS

So this question is posed by Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon.[13] What kind of teshuva is this? And he says, when a person decides in his mind, belev shalem, that he's not going to repeat his aveira - right now, Hashem, I'm in a place where, if I have this state of mind, I would not repeat this aveira - his teshuva will be accepted. And if ta'ava convinces him and seduces him afterwards to change his mind and do aveiros again, he does not lose his teshuva. That's an incredible insight!

He'll be forgiven for those sins that he did prior to his teshuva. And they're going to start writing a new book on him, but only for the aveiros that he does afterwards. Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon tells us that falling after one's teshuva has nothing to do with the effect of the teshuva at its time. If a person is sorry for his aveiros and decides seriously, "I'm not going to go back to them," Hashem will accept his teshuva.

Now, if he faces a new nisayon, that's a new cheshbon. There are many people who don't accept this. You know what they say? "Tens of times I regretted it and decided to stop doing the bad things, but I always go back to doing the same bad things." Chazal say it's like כלב שב על קיאו - a dog has a funny minhag.[14] When he vomits, instead of running away from the vomit, he runs away and then comes right back. He starts fishing around in the vomit, sniffing around in it. Goes away, comes back, always returning to the vomit. So Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon says that even if a person repeats this conduct many times - doing teshuva and then repeating the cheit - they write against him only for what took place after his teshuva.

And if every time he did teshuva he meant it - "I'm sorry, Hashem" - it works. Now, who is Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon talking to? He's talking to regular people who over the years sinned, repeated, sinned, and repeated. Therefore, a person has to know: right now you're coming back to Hashem, right now you're willing to dump your baggage. You have to dump your baggage.

Now, there are times with certain chata'im that a person, even on Yom Kippur, wouldn't refrain from doing. I've seen people have bull sessions on Yom Kippur, foolishly, and they talk lashon hara during these bull sessions. Very silly. It means they have no shaychus to teshuva at all.

[13] ספר אמונות ודעות - מאמר חמישי - אות ה ...שאם החליט האדם בדעתו בזמן תשובתו שלא יחזור עוד [לסורו], אין תשובתו מתבטלת [אם שב וחטא] אלא ימחלו לו העונות שלפני תשובתו, ויכתבו עליו מה שיעשה לאחריה, וכך אם אירע באופן זה כמה פעמים שעושה תשובה וחוזר - אין עליו אלא מה שאחר תשובתו, כיון שהיה בכל פעם שלם בדעתו שלא יחזור.

[14] ירושלמי יומא פרק ח הלכה ז ...ככלב שב על קאו כסיל שונה באולתו (משלי כו) בשונה באותה העבירה

They never meant it. It doesn't mean anything to them. But that's why a very good hanhaga is to decide - it's very good conduct, make it a minhag - that on Yom Kippur you mekabel a ta'anis dibbur. There's no talking on Yom Kippur - none going on. If you are mekabel a ta'anis dibbur, at least you show Hashem that for one day you meant it seriously when you said you're not talking lashon hara. Show Hashem you mean it, that you don't want to talk lashon hara today no matter what. "I don't want to get into it with anybody. I don't want to respond sharply."

That's a tremendous accomplishment before Hashem. Rabbeinu Yona in sefer Sha'arei Teshuva talks about it as well, saying we're not talking about a guy who fools himself.[15] It has to be at the time when you say "I'm sorry" and do viduy, you have no plans to go back to that chet.

At the time you make that decision, your plan must hopefully be never to do this sin again. Because if someone is planning, right as he does viduy, to do this sin again, he is in the category of "tovel vesheretz beyado." That's what a person has to understand: we all have areas in our life where we could definitely say to Hashem, "I'm truly sorry, I don't want to do it again, and I mean it right now 100%." That's what a person has to feel right then, that he's 100% connected to not wanting to repeat the folly.

You can't say, "Hashem, I didn't learn Torah for days, and now I'm going to be mekabel to learn Torah for days," if you're not going to do that. Be mekabel Torah, and be mekabel to do teshuva on your level, whatever you're able to do.

But a person can definitely be mekabel to do teshuva and become someone who never does this chet anymore.

Now, part of the teshuva process is admitting to Hashem that you sinned. You have to understand: by telling Hashem that you sinned, what you're basically saying is: "Give me another chance. I need another chance, Hashem." On Yom Kippur, you have a lot of time, and what you should be thinking about on Yom Kippur are the different aveiros that you did.

Let's say you stole something. Most people steal things. A lot of people take things without realizing exactly that it's stealing. But you say to Hashem: "I'm going to rectify it.I'm going to be more careful going forward." If you do that, that's teshuva.

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[15] ספר שערי תשובה - שער ראשון אות יט

"ומודה ועוזב ירוחם" - פירוש: אף על פי כי יסודות התשובה שלשה: החרטה, והוידוי, ועזיבת החטא. החרטה והוידוי בכלל "מודה", כי המתודה מתחרט, ואין תשובה פחותה משלשה אלה, כי המתחרט ומתודה ואיננו עוזב החטא דומה למי שטובל ושרץ בידו שלא עלתה לו טבילה, אכן מודה ועוזב ירוחם, כי הוא בעל התשובה, אף על פי שיש לתשובה מדרגות רבות, כאשר בארנו:

HAVE TO MAAMIN IN THE KAPPARA

Now, one of the conditions required to merit mechila on Yom HaKippurim is that you have to believe in the teshuva and the kapara of Yom Kippur. The Rambam paskens this halacha clearly: Yom HaKippurim and korbanos atone for a person only if he believes and is maamin in the kappara.

Many people find it very difficult to believe that after Yom Kippur there's a clean slate, that they're different people. They don't believe that they're different people. I remember going to a guy's house in Eretz Yisrael on motzoei Yom Kippurim to pick up something because somebody had arrived from America. What were they doing? Watching television. I was thinking: in Yerushalayim Ir HaKodesh on motzoei Yom HaKippurim, to watch television?! I remember thinking they were clueless. These people totally have no shaychus. And then I chapped:. You've got to believe in teshuvah; you've got to believe that Hashem gave you a new shot. To the degree that you did teshuvah, you have to know it.

When it comes to Ma'ariv on Motzoi Yom HaKippurim, instead of thinking about what you're going to eat or whether you're going to like it, or going somewhere to get good or bad food, a person should think: "Do I believe now, having experienced this twenty-five hour period of Yom HaKippurim, that in Shamayim they look at me differently?" Can you believe that if they called you to Shamayim tonight, the things you did teshuvah for wouldn't be mentioned? They wouldn't be mentioned in your din; they won't bring them up. But unfortunately, many people doubt the kappara of teshuvah.

If you did teshuvah, it behooves you to believe in the teshuvah, because that's a tnai for getting the kappara. That's a condition. That's what a person has to know. The yetzer hara convinces you that you're the same person, getting you to commit this stupid aveira too and not have emunah in teshuvah.

There was once a son of a talmid chacham who came to his father and said he felt he had no regret for his sins. He was struggling with that: "Do I really regret my sins? Maybe not.?" So the father said, "Takeh? Okay, I'm making a gezeira upon you. I'm ordering you: b'gezeiras kibbud av, you should not do teshuvah. Do not do teshuvah." So the kid started to get worried: "Ta, what are you saying? What's going to happen with all my aveiros?" The father smiled and said, "Aha, you don't want them? You want to get rid of the aveiros? That's charata. That *is* charata." "What do you mean?" the kids say. "You don't want to carry this baggage? If a guy has no regrets, that means he wants to carry this baggage." That's what a person has to know.

SINCERELY REGRET PAST AVEIROS

Of course, there are levels of charata, but there's a basic level of charata that simply says, "Hashem, if I had the chance, I wouldn't want to have this on my record." Now, do you have to do charata for things you did fifty years ago (in my case), or that you already did teshuva for in previous years? If you already had charata, you don't have to do it again. But if you have deeper awareness now and feel bad - for example, respecting your parents; the longer a person goes without parents, the more he sometimes regrets that he should have done more - then you feel regret. That's it. There is a phenomenal statement from Rav Saadia Gaon: he says he is boteach, he is certain, על רוב בני עמנו, for most Jewish people, that during the davening of Yamim Noraim, at some point they regret all the aveiros on their hands.

He writes this in Sefer Emunos V'Deos. Nu. To feel embittered and to feel all broken up, that's extra credit. But the teshuva process, Rav Chaim Volozhiner writes, is not hard.

All he has to conclude is, "I would like to dump this aveira. I'd like to take this action out of my history." On computers there's such a concept called history. Yeshiva bochurim know about that. They put things under history and then they make sure if they're smart to erase it from the history.

I know a guy who erased it from his history, but he forgot to close it on the screen. So his mother came, opened the computer, and boom. The guy told me, "I erased it, how is that possible?" I said, "No, you didn't erase it." He said, "I thought I was computer savvy." I said, "You are, but Hashem is more savvy. Hashem set you up." You have to know that you must have charata.

Rabbosai, you have to regret what you did. You have to say, "I want to remove it," and "I'm sorry, Hashem. It was an act that caused distance between me and You, and I want to be mekarev - I want to come close once again. I want to be close to You, Hashem." On Yom Kippur, you say "Ashamnu"; you do vidui ten times.

Don't think once is enough. There are a lot of aveiros, and while at the beginning of Yom Kippur you may be at one level, by the end of Yom Kippur you might be on a much higher level and feel more regret for what you did as you spend the day in shul, davening and asking Hashem for selicha, mechila and kapara. What you can accomplish on Yom Kippur, you cannot do afterwards.

Now, during the Aseres Yamei Teshuva, you should be asking Hashem for assistance so that when Yom Kippur comes, you will be zocheh l'teshuva. Hopefully, Hashem will help and assist you, and you will be zocheh to a gmar chasima tova.

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