



ישיבת הר עזיון

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Selected and Adapted by Rabbi Dov Karoll

Quote from the Rosh Yeshiva

Yom Kippur is a day of grace and not just a response to merit. It is indeed a gift – the greatest gift – and is given to us not when we are fully accomplished, but when we are fully striving. We receive it not when we have attained perfection, but when we aspire for it and recognize its worth. In order to attain that atonement of “you shall be purified before the Lord,” we seek to rid ourselves of impurities and acknowledge what our ultimate duty is in terms of its scope and depth. We present ourselves before the Almighty, trying, qualitatively, to intensify our connection to Him by focusing upon certain specific areas. -Harav Aharon Lichtenstein zt”l in “The Integrity of Teshuva” from *Return and Renewal: Reflections on Teshuva and Spiritual Growth*

Sichat Yom Kippur Yom Kippur: Day of Kingship and Judgment

By Harav Yehuda Amital zt”l



Based on: <https://etzion.org.il/en/holidays/yom-kippur/yom-kippur-day-kingship-and-judgment>

“For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can abide it?” (Yael 2:11). This refers to Yom Kippur, when the books of life and the books of death are sealed. (Midrash Tanchuma, Vayishlach 2)

The central theme of Rosh Ha-shana is God’s kingship, and this remains prominent on Yom Kippur. We see this most clearly in the Amida, where, between Rosh Ha-shana and Yom Kippur, we refer to God as “ha-Melekh ha-Kadosh” – the Holy King.

God’s judgment of man is intrinsically connected to His kingship. The rest of creation serves God unequivocally, performing His will without deviation. Only human beings, who have been granted freedom of choice, are capable of defying the Divine will, and for this reason we are judged. When God judges man’s actions on the Day of Judgment, it is a testament to His kingship. As such, God’s kingship is the essence of the day.

Two aspects of kingship

According to the Gemara, the verse “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one” is an expression of God’s kingship (Rosh Ha-shana 32b). It seems, then, that Divine kingship is expressed through the concept of God’s oneness. The verse reflects 2 aspects of this concept: the intrinsic oneness of God, and the oneness of God as manifested in His authority over all of creation.

The first aspect of oneness is difficult for us to articulate. We proclaim in the Adon Olam prayer that God is the “Master of the Universe, Who reigned before anything was created.” This type of kingship exists independently, having predated the creation of all living things.

Yet the verse “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God” also conveys a second aspect of God’s kingship and unity: His kingship over us. This refers to our perception of God in this world: a God who alternately reveals and hides Himself from us. In this world of quantity and multiplicity, it is critical to emphasize the oneness of God (in Hilkhos Yesodei Ha-Torah 1:7, Rambam emphasizes that knowledge of God’s oneness is a mitzva). This aspect of Divine unity emphasizes that He is the sole sovereign and nothing can impede His reign; though sometimes it may appear otherwise, there is no other authority in this world.

In our world, good and bad are mixed together, and often it is difficult to distinguish between them. Our world is full of contradictions; indeed, this is the idea behind the 2 goats of Yom Kippur – 1 for God and 1 to the wilderness. The 2 goats are of equal appearance, height and value; one would not be able to distinguish between them. It is only from the lottery that we learn that they have different destinies.

Yom Kippur: Focus on kingship in this world

The second verse that we recite in the Shema prayer, “Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity,” seems to contradict the idea of God’s intrinsic oneness. “His glorious kingdom” refers to His kingship as it appears in our eyes, which is miniscule relative to His sovereignty in itself. Because of this, the verse is recited in a whisper. The Gemara explains (Pesachim 56a):

This is analogous to the daughter of a king who smelled the fragrance of the dried spices stuck to the bottom of the pot and craved to eat them. If she reveals her desire, she suffers disgrace; if she does not, she suffers pain. So her servants began bringing it to her in secret.

Throughout the year, the nation of Israel is like the princess who smells the dried spices, which are subordinate to the food. We emphasize God’s kingship over us, but we know and recognize that the kingship that we perceive is minute when compared to His intrinsic kingship, which exists independent of us. Therefore we recite “Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom” in a whisper. Conversely, on Yom Kippur we say “Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom” out loud, because God’s kingship over us is the focus of the day. For this reason, we conclude the Yom Kippur service with the recitation of “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one,” which includes both aspects of kingship.

Kingship over the entire world

God’s kingship is supposed to be “al kol ha-aretz, over the entire world,” and Israel, which is a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” is called upon to bring the world to this point. Everything that happens in the world is linked to the Jewish people, because the history of the world is essentially a struggle over Divine kingship. This struggle would not be possible without the Jewish people. This is the meaning of the verse, “The saviors shall ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau; the kingdom shall be the Lord’s” (Ovadia 1:21). We do not always see the connection between world events and the struggle for Divine kingship. However, as messianic times draw closer, the true meaning of these events becomes clearer, and we increasingly see the centrality of Am Yisrael in the world.

We read in Tehillim (46:3-7): “Therefore we will not fear, though the earth changes and though the mountains are moved in the heart of the sea... God is in her midst; she shall not be moved, God shall help her at the dawn of day. Nations raged, kingdoms were moved; He uttered his voice, the earth melted.”

When we see the events of the world around us, we feel certain that every event leads us closer to “the dawn of day” – to the advent of the redemption and the revelation of the oneness of God. We then beseech the Master of the World, praying that “God shall help her at the dawn of day,” such that everyone will perceive the process that leads to anointing God as the one King of the world.

King David concludes the psalm with the words “Harpu (be still or let go) and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth” (46:11). What is the meaning of the instruction “harpu?” The Midrash explains: “God said to Israel: Let go of your bad deeds and know that I am the Almighty.” (Shir Ha-shirim Rabba 5:2)

Perfecting one’s deeds is linked to knowing God and making His name one. Indeed, the Rambam writes that each person needs to enlist his whole being to focus constantly on 1 purpose: knowledge of God (Shemona Perakim 5). A precondition for the knowledge of God is perfecting one’s deeds and character, which leads to the revelation of Divine kingship in the world. “I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth.”

When the whole world is agitated and afraid of the events that are taking place, Am Yisrael gathers in the synagogues on Yom Kippur to say “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one,” and to add, “Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity.”

Translated by Fran Tanner

Yom Kippur: Teshuva (Repentance) Regret and Redemption

By Rav Ezra Bick

Based on: <https://etzion.org.il/en/holidays/yom-kippur/regret-and-redemption>



One of the great principles of teshuva is that it is not a right but a privilege, an act of mercy which defies natural law. Mesillat Yesharim puts it as follows:

According to strict justice, there should be no correction at all for a sin, for in truth, how can a man straighten that which he has made crooked, when the sin is already done? If a man murdered his neighbor... how can this be corrected? Can he wipe out the act from

existence?... Rather, repentance is granted to sinners as an act of pure lovingkindness, so that the cancellation of the will... be considered the cancellation of the act.

In other words, history is history. Even if regret is worthy of approval and reward, it should not have the power to erase the transgression. Indeed, human justice embodies this principle. Once a crime has been committed, the mere expression of regret and repentance does not suffice to protect the criminal from conviction (though it might mitigate punishment). Repentance, then, and its ability to wipe the slate clean and return man to a state of innocence, belongs not to the realm of justice or law, but to that of mercy. God, in His infinite grace, redeems undeserving man from the results of his own actions, relying on his change of heart to effect a change in history.

Rav Elchanan Wasserman (Kovetz Maamarim, p.23) posed the following question to the Chofetz Chaim concerning this principle: The Gemara in Kiddushin (40b) states that even one who was righteous all his life can lose all merit if he rebels at the end. The Gemara asks: Should he not be considered as having a mixed record: i.e., have his mitzvot count, with the sin of his old age added to the record. "Resh Lakish said: This refers to one who doubts the earlier actions (i.e., he regrets the mitzvot he performed)." We see here that regret obliterates the mitzvot performed as though they never occurred. Since mercy and grace are not at work here, does this not indicate that it is justice which demands that regret cancel good deeds? If so, it should surely cancel sins by the same token.

Rav Elchanan records that the Chofetz Chaim answered that it depends on the nature of the teshuva. The Gemara states that teshuva me'ahava (repentance out of love; i.e., heartfelt regret) results in the sins being transmuted into merits, whereas teshuva miyir'a (repentance out of fear) results in sins being transmuted into shegagot – unintentional lapses. While justice requires that one who genuinely regrets his actions not be held accountable for them, that the sins be considered as merits is an act of pure mercy. Hence, one who does teshuva me'ahava is forgiven out of justice, and mercy is required for him to reach the higher level where his sins are transmuted into merits. On the other hand, one who simply fears imminent punishment but does not genuinely regret his misdeeds, has no claim to justice and the efficacy of his teshuva is completely dependent on God's mercy.

Rav Elchanan rejects the applicability of this answer to the statement of the Mesillat Yesharim, which indicates that even one who has completely, sincerely regretted his actions requires the attribute of mercy for his repentance to be effective. Rav Elchanan therefore suggests another answer, based on a distinction raised elsewhere in Mesillat Yesharim. All mitzvot and all sins have 2 aspects. The first is that they represent obedience or rebellion vis-à-vis the word of God. This is expressed in the Talmudic statement that one who is commanded and performs a mitzva is greater than one who volunteers. The second is the positive or negative influence that the action has on his soul. Every commandment of God has a value and effect for the one who performs it. Rav Elchanan suggests that logically, regret corrects the element of rebellion against God in sin. Repentance can repair one's relationship with God to its pre-rebellion state. However, the consequences of the act are unaffected by one's psychological regret. Here, the miraculous mercy of God shines forth, as He repairs the damage to the sinner, to his soul, and to the world, granting him atonement and purification as a response to his repentance.

The distinction which serves as the basis for this answer is central to the idea of repentance and is in fact implied by the Chofetz Chaim's answer. Sin is not merely the cause of God's displeasure with the sinner. It is a stain, a corruption, in the soul of the sinner. Repentance is not merely mending one's fences with God, but, in the similes used by Tanakh and Chazal, it is cleansing, purification, catharsis, and healing for the sinner who is defiled, impure, corrupt, diseased. It is precisely this aspect of sin which requires the transformation into merits mentioned in the Chofetz Chaim's answer. Shegagot, unintentional acts, are not deserving of punishment. God forgives them. But they leave a mark. Ramban, for instance, states that suffering is intended to cleanse man of the impurities in his soul caused by unintentional transgressions. This idea is also portrayed in a midrash about Avraham Avinu (Bereishit Rabba 39:8):

"Your people come forward willingly on the day of your battle; in majestic holiness, from the womb, from the dawn, yours was the dew of youth..." (Ps. 110:3) Yours was the dew of youth – For Avraham Avinu was anxious, saying: Do I bear a sin, since I was an idol worshipper all those years? God said to him: Yours was the dew of youth – just as the dew evaporates, so your sins evaporate.

Avraham knew that since he had repented, he had no reason to fear being punished for his early sins. The idolatry of Avraham's youth was, in any event, the result of his upbringing. Halachically, he was the classic tinok shenishba, literally brought up among the heathens, whose status is that of shogeg. But Avraham was anxious about the residual stain upon his soul; he felt a heaviness which weighed him down. Hence the promise, not of forgiveness, but evaporation, returning Avraham to the unsullied state of his youth. This Avraham did not expect, for it is not a logical, natural process, but rather one of grace and mercy.

Presenting this aspect of teshuva in the character of Avraham is important, for Avraham is Avinu, the archetype of a Jew. Rejuvenation is hence the hallmark of our relationship with God. The Midrash depicts rejuvenation as the central symbol of Avraham: "Avraham's 'coin' was

circulated in the world. What was his coin? An old man and woman on one side, a young man and woman on the other” (Bereishit Rabba 39:11). The aspiration to freshness and purity is more than a desire to escape punishment or rejection. This everlasting hope to return to the dew of one’s youth even after years of weary toil and defeat is an integral part of the Jewish experience from its inception.

Rav Hutner (Pachad Yitzchak, Rosh Hashana, 74) advances a different answer to the question. He explains that the Gemara in Kiddushin does not support the conclusion that regret can cancel sin in any sense, for the paths leading from evil to good and that leading from good to evil are not analogous. The Torah teaches us that the dichotomy of good and evil is equivalent to that of life and death. The evolution of life into death is a natural, universal phenomenon. However, the opposite is unknown, so much so that *tehiyat hameitim*, the resurrection, is considered the greatest of all miracles. Life must be constantly supported with food, water, and air, whereas death is a self-sufficient state which requires no effort to maintain. The same is true of good and evil. Good, even after it has come into being, must be sustained, else it loses its vitality and progressively decays. The food, the sustenance, of good, Rav Hutner teaches, is the faith of man in its value. A man who regrets the good he has done, who no longer believes in it, destroys its foundation of existence in this world of natural law. The opposite is not true, however. Like death, evil, once it comes into existence, continues to exist by means of inertia, and there is no natural way to transform it. Only God’s infinite power and mercy can restore life where once it has been removed, replacing evil with good. Hence, *teshuva* depends totally on God’s grace.

Rav Hutner’s explanation highlights the precarious nature of good. True, we believe that good comes from God and that ultimately evil has no basis in reality. In this world, however, a world of natural law separated from God, good can only exist where man, the image of God, struggles to give it life by investing reality with his faith, his effort, and his commitment. One of the attributes of God is “*chai*” – life, meaning that God is life itself and all life requires the presence of God to support it. Sin is death because it drives a wedge between God and the sinner. It is not difficult to cut off something from life; hence the *tzaddik* can negate a lifetime of virtue in an instant. To recreate a connection to life, transcendence is required. “Great is *teshuva*,” state Chazal, “for it reaches up until the throne of glory.” It must reach up until the throne of God or else it will be ineffective in resurrecting the tired souls, the dying and the dead. On the other hand, even inattention, apathy, or loss of faith suffices to undo the good that exists. It is a law of nature that any system left uncared for will become chaotic and any organism left unfed will tend toward death. Even great accomplishments of the past will stagnate and decay if they are not continually supported by the faith and the efforts of man. In God’s world, all is life; in this world, life can only exist where man brings the name of God.

May it be His will that we be inscribed for a year of life and redemption, for us and all Yisrael.

Avodat Yom HaKippurim: Machshava Ya’akov Esav, and the Yom Kippur Ritual By Rav Elyakim Krumbein



Based on: <https://etzion.org.il/en/holidays/yom-kippur/yaakov-esav-and-yom-kippur-ritual>

I. THE TWO GOATS AND THE TWO BROTHERS

In his commentary to Parashat Acharei-Mot, Abarbanel quotes a midrash (Bereishit Rabba 65:15) which sees the *se’ir la-azazel* (scapegoat) as representing Esav, Ya’akov’s brother:

“And the goat will carry upon him” (Vayikra 16:22) – meaning Esav; “all their sins” – the sins of the simple man (“*avonotam*” = *avonot tam*), as it is said: “And Ya’akov was a simple (*tam*) man” (Bereishit 25:27).

Abarbanel develops the parable further, claiming that the second goat, which is sacrificed to the Lord, symbolizes Ya’akov. Ya’akov and his descendants inherit the World-to-Come, symbolized by the sprinkling of this goat’s blood in the Holy of Holies. However, the scapegoat “is cast away to a barren land – just as Esav in his youth was a hunter, and a man of the field, but was sent away from the Land of the Lord.”

The 2 goats of Yom Kippur are mentioned in another midrash (Bereishit Rabba 65:14), expounding Yitzchak’s request, “Fetch me from there 2 good kids of the goats” (27:9): “‘Good’ – good for you, and good for your descendants, because by them they are cleansed on Yom Kippur, 1 to the Lord and 1 to Azazel.” The first midrash sees the 2 goats as representing Ya’akov and Esav; the second one – as representing the 2 kids Ya’akov brought to his father.

Those 2 midrashim do not exhaust the parallels between Ya’akov’s conflict with his brother and Avodat Yom Ha-kippurim (the Yom Kippur ritual in the Temple). Many motifs in *seder ha-avoda* (the ritual order) echo the struggle between the brothers.

For example, Ya’akov’s entrance to his father’s room, waiting for a blessing, reminds us of the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) entering the Holy of Holies. Moreover, Ya’akov wears special clothes for the occasion, just as does the Kohen Gadol, and Yitzchak notes “the smell of my son,”

which may parallel the incense. Small wonder, then, that the Midrash compares Ya'akov's gift to his father to the 2 goats of Yom Kippur, which enable the Kohen to enter the Kodesh.

The Midrash quoted by Abarbanel, which compares the scapegoat to Esav himself, is also well founded in the story of the blessings. Ya'akov objects to his mother's proposal: "But Esav my brother is a hairy man (sa'ir = hairy; se'ir = goat)" (27:11). Rivka responds by dressing her son in goats' skins, making him hairy as well. (Abarbanel explains the solution differently, noting that Ya'akov is the tza'ir [younger] brother; but that seems rather difficult, and unnecessary.) So both Ya'akov and Esav are like 2 goats, only 1 of which will enter the Kodesh – their father's room – and receive a blessing. The twin brothers become so similar physically, that even their own (admittedly blind) father cannot recognize the one from the other – just as the Halakha requires the 2 goats to be equal in height and appearance (Yoma 62a). And like the 2 goats, the brothers' fates hang on a thread: only 1 will receive the blessing (sacrificed to the Lord), and the other one will be cast out (to the Azazel).

Ya'akov meets Esav again in Bereishit 32-33, and even there we find parallels to Avodat Yom Ha-kippurim. Ya'akov needs to pacify his brother with gifts, comprised of herds of animals. The scapegoat sent to the wilderness is often viewed as a "gift" to the "se'irim," so it should not surprise us to find that Ya'akov's first gift to Esav is a flock of goats. Here, Esav is identified with the forces of evil.

Later, however, he seems again to parallel the scapegoat itself. The man who struggles with Ya'akov all night – identified by Chazal (Bereishit Rabba 77:3) with Esav's guardian angel – begs, "Send me away," just as the scapegoat is "sent away." Subsequently, Esav himself physically heads back to the wilderness, departing for Mount Se'ir "away from his brother Ya'akov" (36:6).

II. THE TENT AND THE FIELD

In Sefer Vayikra, the parasha of avodat Yom Ha-kippurim is followed by the parasha of shechutei chutz (literally, "those slaughtered outside" – animals which have been slaughtered, but whose blood has not brought as an offering to the Temple). Apparently, the Torah juxtaposes them to develop further the contrast between the Ohel Mo'ed (Tent of Meeting) and the wilderness, between God and Azazel. A deep chasm has opened between the 2 identical goats. The labels "for God" and "for Azazel" indicate not only their destinations, but their essences as well.

In the short mention in Vayikra 16:22, we gain the impression that the wilderness is an evil place, the proper place for our iniquities. And here, the Torah contrasts sacrifice in the Ohel Mo'ed, which serves as a peace offering to God, and slaughter "in the open field" (17:5). An ordinary act of animal slaughter is vehemently denounced: "Blood shall be imputed to that man; he has shed blood" (17:4). In no other place does the Torah call animal slaughter "bloodshed;" here it does so twice. Idol worship, too, is more than hinted at: "And they shall no more offer their sacrifices to the 'se'irim' (demons)" (17:7). A sacred rite, which serves to unite God and man when performed "inside," is now the cause of "karet," the cutting off from God of one who slaughters "outside" (17:9). There is no third option; if Ohel Mo'ed is abandoned, the wilderness comes to the camp, and the demons crowd in.

In Bereishit, the contrast between Ohel Mo'ed and "the open field" is exemplified by Ya'akov, the "dweller of tents," and Esav, the "man of the field" (25:27). There are other allusions to Esav in our parasha – the references to blood remind us that Esav was called Edom (red), and Esav the hunter is the forerunner of "whichever man... hunts venison of any beast or bird" (Vay. 17:13). The link from shechutei chutz to bloodshed and idolatry illuminates Chazal's imputing those crimes to Esav (BB 16b). (Chazal also impute incest to Esav, perhaps because avodat Yom Ha-kippurim and shechutei chutz are followed by the parasha of incestuous relationships.)

III. THE NATURE OF THE STRUGGLE AGAINST ESAV

We must now attempt to understand the messages the Torah implied in these parallels. Let us raise a few points for thought.

Perhaps the most prominent theme of the Torah is the sanctifying of the nation, and the devolving of God's Presence upon them. This is expressed by sacrifice and worship, reaching its apex when the Kohen Gadol enters Holy of Holies at the climax of Yom Kippur. It may be no coincidence that this climax is preceded, and even completed, by a reference to the wild, demonic powers "outside." The other sacrifices whose blood is brought into the Kodesh (Mishna Zevachim ch. 5) are totally burnt outside the camp, and defile all those who participate in them (Vayikra 4). The higher holiness ascends, the more powerful the opposite forces become – as if "provoked" by it, and induced to raise more obstacles to it. Or perhaps that is exactly the essence of human holiness, combating and overcoming those very animalistic, demonic forces?

Once confronted with these forces, 2 different ways of overcoming them are feasible, and the Torah suggests both. In the Avoda, the goat

is sent to the wilderness, with all evil forces cast away. We turn our back on these evil forces and reject them, thus perpetuating the struggle. “The Lord will have a war with Amalek to all generations” (Shemot 17:16; note that Amalek is the grandson of Esav). On the other hand, in the parasha of shechutei chutz, the Torah offers the evil forces in man a chance of redemption – the shedding of animal blood “outside” is transformed into sacrifice inside the Ohel Mo’ed, becoming a Peace Offering between God and man. Chazal teach us that the evil impulse must always be “kept away by the left hand, but drawn near by the right” (Sota 47a).

When Yitzchak asked Esav to bring him venison, offering him a blessing for it, he was following the “shechutei chutz” approach. But Ya’akov turned the tables. Instead of venison, he brought his father 2 kids from the flock – an easily available, tender meat, needing no laborious chase and no long preparation. The blessing of Ya’akov comes naturally to one whose smell is “like the smell of the field which the Lord has blessed” (27:27). But it consequently leads to further polarization, and to the final rejection of Esav; when he comes in immediately afterwards, Chazal describe Yitzchak as fearfully recognizing “Hell opening under his feet” (Rashi on Bereishit 27:33, following Bereishit Rabba 66:2). Esav becomes the scapegoat, sent to the wilderness.

Ya’akov must make amends – and he does so when he recognizes the need to pacify Esav and offer him gifts. In his struggle with the angel, Ya’akov finds “he cannot overcome him” (32:26). Complete victory will not be his if he pursues the violent struggle alone – and he sets his adversary free. Spiritually, he is no longer entrenched in total separation from his brother and his way; he knows his mission extends there as well, and starts his long, slow way “to my lord to Se’ir” (33:14). He makes no immediate plans, but knows he must get there before the final Redemption (Rashi *ibid.*).

In our calendar, both approaches are crystallized in the holidays of Tishrei. Yom Kippur is the day of fatal combat, culminating in the casting away of all “outside” forces. Sukkot is a time of appeasement, when we sacrifice 70 bulls in the Temple for the peace of all nations (Sukka 55b).

Translated by David Fuchs

Yom Kippur: Teshuva Varieties of Teshuva By Rav Binyamin Tabory z”l



Adapted from: <https://etzion.org.il/en/holidays/yom-kippur/varieties-teshuva>

Rambam, citing the Sifrei, identifies avodat Hashem (service of God) with tefilla (prayer) and counts tefilla as the fifth mitzva of the 613. He maintains that although “serving Him with all your heart” could be considered a general mitzva which would not be counted among the Taryag, this general statement has a specific application, namely tefilla. Apparently, although all our actions, deeds and thoughts should be channeled and directed towards God, somehow tefilla is the epitome of His Service. It is thus noteworthy that Rambam also cites another opinion, namely that avodat Hashem can be equated with the study of Torah. It seems that although the general approach to God is through tefilla, there are some who reach their height of spirituality through the intellectual pursuit of Torah.

It is interesting to note a comment of the Gra, who undoubtedly personified the special level of avodat Hashem through Torah. The Gemara (Shabbat 31a) quotes a verse in Yirmeyahu and interprets it to mean that on the ultimate Yom Hadin (Day of Judgment), each person will be asked a number of questions: Did you handle your transactions ethically (be’emuna)? Did you set aside time for Torah study? Were you fruitful in this world? and so on. Chakhmei hamussar cite this gemara to show that avodat Hashem must be demonstrated in all areas of life. Indeed, the first question asked on Yom Hadin does not seem to be about Torah or tefilla or Shabbat – it is about honesty and ethics.

While the Gra certainly endorsed all these values, he raises a technical problem. Tosafot (Kid. 40b) point out that according to the gemara there the first question asked on Yom Hadin is about Torah studies; so these 2 gemarot seem contradictory. The Gra answers that all the questions in gemara in Shabbat actually refer to the study of Torah. The first question is: Did you study Seder Zera’im (which is called Sefer Emuna)? The second question refers to Seder Mo’ed, the third to Nashim, etc. The centrality of Torah in the Gra’s world of values is reflected in the fact that he interprets all 6 questions enumerated there as relating to the study of the entirety of Torah.

As Yom Kippur approaches, our thoughts naturally turn to teshuva, tefilla and tzedaka. The Rav zt”l pointed out in a Kinus Teshuva that the Torah refers to Yom Kippurim in the plural. He explained the name as meaning the day on which we strive to attain kappara. However, the plural form shows that there are different ways to attain kappara. In his characteristically dramatic style, the Rav then mentioned various gedolim, demonstrating how the Yom Kippur of each was unique and did not resemble that of any other.

Although the classic approach to Yom Kippur must include teshuva, tefilla and tzedaka, in light of the Rambam’s addition of Torah as

the epitome of avodat Hashem there seems to be a special form of teshuva which relates to talmud Torah. Rabbenu Yona in Shaarei Teshuva (see fourth sha'ar, chapters IV, XI) avers that teshuva through Torah is effective even for sins which seem to be unpardonable. The prophet Yeshayahu implies that the sin (avon) of Chillul Ha-shem (desecration of God's Name) has no kappara at all. However, according to Rabbenu Yona, even Chillul Ha-shem has a "cure" through Torah. Pointing to a verse in Mishlei which states that the "avon" has "kappara" through "chesed" and "emet," he explains that "emet" refers to the study of Torah leshem shamayim ("vetoratkha emet"), and advises that increasing talmud Torah can serve as protection from suffering. While the customary forms cannot be ignored, we see that bnei Torah have an additional approach to teshuva – teshuva through talmud Torah. Of course, this requires commitment both in time and scope of Torah, but we remember "the labor is not upon you to complete, though you are not free to refrain from it." May we all merit complete teshuva, and have a gemar chatima tova, lanu u'lekhool Yisrael.

Yom Kippur: Haftara – Sefer Yona

Drawing Inspiration from the Temple to Nineveh

By Rav David Silverberg

Based on: <https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/neviim/sefer-yona/sefer-yona>



Sefer Yona, which is read during mincha on Yom Kippur, tells the story of the citywide repentance performed by the people of Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian Empire. God sent the prophet Yona to Nineveh to implore them to repent and cure the moral ills of their society, but Yona initially refused to undertake the mission. He instead attempted to escape his assignment by boarding a ship to set sail to a distant land, but God brought a storm which resulted in his being cast into the sea. After he miraculously survived, he accepted the mission and succeeded in persuading the people of Nineveh to repent.

The Talmud Yerushalmi (cited by Tosafot, Sukka 50b) tells that Yona "was among the pilgrims" who visited the Beit Ha-mikdash on the festivals (Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot). He received the gift of prophecy, the Yerushalmi teaches, due to the experience of the simchat beit ha-sho'eiva – the festive celebration held in the Temple each night of Sukkot. The Yerushalmi comments that the simchat beit ha-sho'eiva is so named because divine inspiration was "drawn" (sho'eiva) from that experience. The special spiritual fervor experienced at this event had the ability to elevate a person to the level of prophecy.

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm boldly suggested that this background contributed not only to Yona's prophetic capabilities, but also to the flaw which he had and ultimately corrected – escapism. Yona, Rabbi Lamm describes, was "a man who found himself unable to face life." When he was commanded to confront the evil people of Nineveh, Yona escaped, because, in Rabbi Lamm's words, he felt "unable to face evil and evildoers." This weakness, Rabbi Lamm proposes, was caused by his spiritual character having been molded by the euphoric festivities of the simchat beit ha-sho'eiva. Rabbi Lamm writes:

Jonah witnessed the happiness in the courts of the Temple. He saw the beauty and majesty and grandeur and holiness of Jewish life, but he never saw treachery and corruption, he never saw destruction and catastrophe and ruination; he saw the Temple in its glory, but he did not see it in its moments of mourning and destitution. And a man, no matter how great, who was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, weaned on milk and honey and exposed only to the pleasant and the sweet, and never the wretched and the bitter, a man of that sort inevitably becomes an escapist and runs away from life.

Yona experienced religious life as one of pristine, unbridled joy and exhilaration. The experience of the simchat beit ha-sho'eiva is what elevated him to the stature of prophet, but it was not counterbalanced by the complexities and grueling challenges that accompany religious life. And he therefore could not bring himself to confront the wicked people of Nineveh, to go out into the trenches and work to effect change.

Religious life is experienced both in the joy and sanctity of the Beit Ha-mikdash, as well as in "Nineveh," in the difficult realities of our very imperfect, complex world. We are, on the one hand, to exult in the joy and excitement of connecting to God through Torah observance, but we are also called upon to go to "Nineveh," to confront, rather than escape, the harsh realities of the world in an effort to improve it. We mustn't delude ourselves into thinking that religious life is only about the "simchat beit ha-sho'eiva" – joy and exhilaration. While this is certainly an important component of the religious experience, we must also be prepared to undertake less pleasant tasks, to go to "Nineveh" when necessary to confront evil and try to make the world a better and holier place.

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