

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
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Shlita

Yom Kippur



בס"ד

Torah WELLSPRINGS

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Torah Wellsprings

Yom Kippur

A Day Transcending Time

Many people refer to Yom Kippur as יום הקדוש, "the holy day," without calling it by its real name - Yom Kippur.

The Gemara also seems to refrain from using the term Yom Kippur, as the tractate that deals with the halachos of Yom Kippur is called יומא "The Day."¹

Also in *Chumash* (Vayikra 16:29), twenty-eight pesukim discuss a set of *korbanos* without mentioning when they are brought! Finally, after twenty-eight pesukim, the Torah tells us (16:29) בחדש אחד that these *korbanos* are offered on the tenth day of Tishrei, on Yom Kippur.

The Bnei Yissaschar (*Tishrei* 8) explains that this is because Yom Kippur comes from a hidden place; therefore, it is proper to conceal it. Hiding its name signifies that it comes from a concealed world."

The fact that Yom Kippur is a day beyond time is alluded to in *Vayikra* 16:2. It states there ואל יבא בכל עת אל הקודש, "The [Kohen Gadol] should not come at all times into the Kodesh HaKadoshim." The Kli Yakar explains that he may not enter on any day connected to time - עת. He may only go there on Yom Kippur, a day above time.

The Kodesh Kadashim was a place beyond the boundaries of this world.

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

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

This is because the Kodesh Kadoshim is beyond the physical constraints of time and space.

On Yom Kippur, the Jewish people become spiritual beings, like *malachim*, transcending the boundaries of this world

The Tur (606, quoting *Pirkei d'Reb Eliezer*) writes: "The Satan sees that there are no sins among the Jewish nation on Yom Kippur and he says, 'Master of the world, You have a nation on earth that resembles the *malachim* in heaven. The *malachim* are barefoot, as is the Jewish nation on Yom Kippur. *Malachim* don't have knees, like the Jewish

nation who stand erect the entire Yom Kippur. *Malachim* are clean from all sins, and so is the Jewish nation on Yom Kippur. There is peace among the *malachim*, just like the Jewish nation on Yom Kippur [who ask forgiveness from one another erev Yom Kippur].' Hakadosh Baruch Hu accepts the Satan's testimony and forgives their sins."

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

But on Yom Kippur, when the Jewish nation

becomes pure like the *malachim*, they shout out, in public, ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד.

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

When one does *teshuvah*, he enters a realm that is above time. So, on Yom Kippur, the day, the location, the service of teshuvah, and the Jewish nation are all beyond this world's boundaries. All these aspects come together on this holy day to help the Jewish nation achieve atonement.

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

The Mishnas Chassidim explains that it is beneficial for us to go barefoot on Yom Kippur and in the Beis HaMikdash because this enables us to acquire the holiness that's there. Yom Kippur is so holy that even the earth contains purity on that day.

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

The Sar Shalom replied, "I'm fine. I just wanted to

inhale the holy air of Yom Kippur.²

About Yom Kippur it states (*Yoel* 2:11), כִּי גָדוֹל יוֹם ה' וְנֹרָא מְאֹד, "For Hashem's day is great and very awesome."

It is a very holy day, and from this day, we can acquire holiness and closeness to Hashem that will be experienced and appreciated throughout the year.³

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

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

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

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

3. Reb Mordechai Chaim of Slonim zt'l would repeat the following

The Mitzvah to Eat on Erev Yom Kippur

Shulchan Aruch (604) states, מצוה לאכל בערב יום הכפורים, ולהרבות בסעודה, "There's a mitzvah to eat on *erev Yom Kippur*..." The source for

this mitzvah is from the pasuk (*Vayikra* 23:32), ועניתם את נפשותיכם בתשעה לחודש, "You shall fast on the ninth day of the month." The Gemara asks an obvious question. Don't we fast on the tenth

mashal each year at the *seudah hamafsekas*:

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

A thief realized that if he gets his hands on this bird, he would be able charge money from the spectators.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

day, not on the ninth? The Gemara answers that the pasuk is telling us to eat on erev Yom Kippur, and if you eat on this day, you will be rewarded as if you fasted – ועיינתם. The reward for fasting is greater than the reward for eating because rewards are always in accordance with the difficulty. This time, however, for the easy mitzvah of eating, you are rewarded as if you fasted.

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

Rabbeinu Yonah (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 4:9) teaches that we have meals on Shabbos and yom tov, and we make seudos mitzvah is because when a mitzvah is performed with joy, the value of the mitzvah increases immensely. "But on Yom Kippur, we fast and we can't eat meals. Therefore, the Torah commands us to eat on *erev Yom Kippur* and in that way, we show that we are happy with the mitzvos."

The meal on erev Yom Kippur is to celebrate the mitzvos of Yom Kippur (the fasting, the tefillos, the teshuvah, the halachos yom tov, etc.). Our joy will increase our reward for keeping these mitzvos.

Furthermore, the Rabbeinu Yonah (*ibid.* 4:8) writes, "[We eat meals *erev Yom Kippur*], as this shows that one is happy that the time of his atonement has arrived."

This explanation is supported by a story stated in a Midrash and quoted by the Tur:

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

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

The mayor summoned the tailor.

"What do you do?"

"I'm a tailor."

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

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

The mayor accepted the tailor's explanation and let him go.

The Midrash concludes that when the tailor opened the fish, he found a diamond inside, and "He had *parnassah* from it for the rest of his life."⁴

The Rabbeinu Yonah writes a third reason why

we have a mitzvah to eat on *erev Yom Kippur*: "It is so we will have strength and energy on Yom Kippur to pray and to seek ways to do *teshuvah*."

There is a fourth reason why we eat *seudos* on *erev Yom Kippur*, taught by Rebbe Yohusha of Belz *zt'l*:

When one fasts, it is like he is bringing a *korban*. The fats and blood of his body that become less on a fast day are as if they were sacrificed on the *mizbeiach*. Indeed, about a fast day, we say, יהי רצון מלפניך שיהא מיעוט חלבי ודמי שנתמעט היום כחלב מונח על גבי המזבח לפניך "...May it be Your will that my fats and my blood that became less today due to my fast be considered like the fats and blood that go on the *mizbeiach*."

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zt'l* explains that the *erev Yom Kippur* meals increase

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

a person's fats and blood. Those are the blood and fats from a mitzvah that we want to sacrifice to Hashem on Yom Kippur. We don't want to sacrifice regular blood and fats. Therefore, we have a mitzvah to eat on *erev Yom Kippur*.

The *Sfas Emes Hakadmon* (quoted in *Ein Yaakov, Yoma*, 81: *Anaf Yosef*) teaches that the purpose of the meals on *erev Yom Kippur* is to put people in a good mood, so they will be willing to forgive their fellow man. He writes, "I think the atonement takes place more on the ninth day than on the tenth. Because on the ninth day, the Jewish nation makes peace with one another. As Chazal say, if you sinned to your fellow man, you aren't forgiven before you receive

his forgiveness. When one fasts, he is angry and that divides people. But when one eats and drinks, he has a happy heart, and all Yidden unite."⁵

Forgiving

Shulchan Aruch (606:1) writes, והמוחל לא יהיה אכזרי מלמחול. This means that when someone asks you for forgiveness, don't be cruel. Forgive him.

The *Mishnah Berurah* adds that you benefit from this because just as you forgive your fellow man, Hashem will forgive you. If someone harmed you intentionally and you forgive him, Hashem will forgive you for the aveiros you committed on purpose. "But if you don't forgive, Hashem won't forgive, either."

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

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

A higher level is to forgive your fellow man, even before he asks you for *mechilah*.

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

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

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

When the man stood up, the mound of earth that he had laid on crumbled and fell down a cliff. He realized he was saved a second time because had the mound crumbled a

moment earlier, he would have toppled down the cliff together with it.

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

The man replied that he merited the miracles because he forgives his fellow man. "At night, before I go to sleep, I forgive everyone who wronged me, and I seek to do kindness with them."

Reb Abba cried and said, "Your deeds are greater than Yosef HaTzaddik's. Yosef forgave his brothers, as is proper that family members should forgive one another. But you forgive even people who aren't your family, which is a greater level. Therefore, you deserve that Hakadosh Baruch Hu should perform many miracles for you."⁶

6. On Chanukah, many chasidim go to their Rebbes to watch them

light Chanukah *lecht*. In a large chasidus in Yerushalayim, the Rebbe requested, "This year, I want the *bachurim* near me when I light the Chanukah *lecht*."

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

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

Together, they pushed their way to the front of the room, to be near the Rebbe when he *tzinds lecht*.

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

The *bachur* who instigated this plan responded, "When you go away from your place, we'll leave ours."

"Go back to your place," the *gabai* demanded, but it didn't help. The enraged *gabai* slapped the *bachur*, the ringleader, just as the Rebbe entered the beis medresh. The *bachur* ran out of the beis medresh, in shame.

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

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

A few days later, the Rebbe called for the *bachur*. It was Thursday night, the fifth night of Chanukah. A *Chok l'Yisrael Chumash* was on the Rebbe's table, opened to that day's portion of the *Zohar*. The Rebbe asked the *bachur* to read the *Zohar*. It told the story (stated above) of Reb Abba witnessing how someone's life was saved twice. A poisonous snake was killed before it could strike, and a mound of earth crumbled and fell moments immediately after the man got off of it – all because this man forgave his fellow man.

The Rebbe said, "Do you understand what I am telling you? The

way of the Torah is to forgive. And if you forgive miracles will happen to you."

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

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

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

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

He couldn't fall asleep, so he collected the *shamashim* from all the Chanukah menorahs that were lit in the room and put them on a chair near his bed. Lying in bed, he studied Gemara by the light of the *shamashim*. As can be expected, he fell asleep. The Gemara fell on the candles and his bed caught fire. Fortunately, he awoke in time. He was surrounded by fire. He jumped out of bed and quickly woke up the other *bachurim* in his room. They called the fire department.

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

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

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

During the Six Day War, many people took refuge in the bomb shelter basement of the Mirrer Yeshivah, Yerushalayim. After the war, some *bachurim* went up to the roof of the yeshiva and found three bombs there. Miraculously they hadn't detonated.

Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz *zt'l* told the yeshiva students, "You

So, we see that forgiving your fellow man is *mesugal* that Hashem will act *midah kneged midah* and He will forgive you and also perform miracles for you.

Forgiving others is also *mesugal* for good children. The *mekubal* Reb Yaakov *zt'l* merited to be the father of Rebbe Aharon HaGadol of Karlin *zt'l* in the merit of forgiving others. There are two versions of the story.

According to one version, moments before Yom Kippur, Reb Yaakov stood in shul, handing out *machzorim*. Several people put out their hands to receive a *machzor*, and Reb Yaakov gave them

machzorim without any particular order.

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

According to the other version, Reb Yaakov was the chazan on Yom Kippur night and davened a long *Shemonah Esrei*. Then, as he took three steps back, a wealthy person smacked him for davening so long.

Either way, the end of the story is the same according to both versions:

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

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

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

But Reb Yaakov told them that he had already forgiven him.

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

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

There was a divorcee who would eat Shabbos and *yom tov* seudos with a family in Bnei Brak. One day, the guest insulted the host and the host answered back. The guest got up and left in the middle of the

meal and did not return for months.

Erev Yom Kippur, the *baalabuste* told her husband, "Maybe you should ask *mechilah* from our guest? He was so hurt."

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

"That's true, but I still think you should ask *mechilah*. Maybe in this merit, our older daughter will find her *shidduch*."

Their daughter was nearing thirty, and her parents were worried about her.

So, the husband promised to ask for forgiveness.

Finding the guest's phone number took some time because he had moved to Boro Park. He finally got through to him moments before *Kol Nidrei*, and they had a friendly conversation.

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

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

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

After this conversation, the couple in Bnei Brak felt in their hearts that now their daughter would have her *yeshuah*.

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

Their old guest arrived on Chol HaMoed, as they were celebrating the *vort*.

The guest came in with a big smile on his face, and he said, "I'm coming from my own *vort*! I got engaged tonight." They danced together with tears of joy in their eyes.

This is because all brachos come from peace and unity. Where there is forgiveness, the channels of brachos and salvation are open, and there will be children, shidduchim, health, miracles, and all our heart's desires.

Grab Merits

The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 3:4) writes, "Everyone should consider himself as being 50% righteous (זכאי) and 50% guilty (חייב) and think that also the world is 50% righteous and 50% guilty. If he does an *aveirah*, he will tip his own scale and the scale of the entire world to the side of guilt, bringing destruction to the world. And if he does a mitzvah, he will tip himself and the entire world to the

side of merit, bringing salvation to him and the entire world. This is the meaning of the pasuk (Mishlei 10:25) וצדיק יסוד עולם, 'A tzaddik is the foundation of the world.' This is because his righteous deeds tilt the scale to the side of merit, thereby saving the entire world. This is why Bnei Yisrael increase *tzedakah*, good deeds, and mitzvos from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur even more than the rest of the year. Everyone awakens at night (before morning) these ten days and goes to the beis knesses to pray supplications."

Giving *tzedakah* during Aseres Yemei Teshuvah is a *segulah* for a good judgment. Rabbeinu Efraim writes that this is hinted at in the words (*Devarim* 16:20), צדק צדק תרדוף למען תחיה וירשת, which can be translated as follows: צדק צדק תרדוף, run after the mitzvah of צדקה. Why? למען תחיה, so that you will be written in the book of life. וירשת implies that

you should give *tzedakah* ו תשרי, during six days of Aseres Yemei Teshuvah. (We can't give *tzedakah* on the two days of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Shabbos Shuvah. This leaves us with six days when we can give *tzedakah*.)

But it isn't only *tzedakah*. There are many mitzvos we can perform, which will tip the scale in our favor.

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

But The Chasam Sofer didn't want to wait until then. He asked her to take care of it immediately because he wanted this merit for Yom Kippur.

Later that day, she returned to her father and said, "The orphan boy is concerned about the

shidduch, because the girl doesn't have any money."

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

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

Dealing with this *shidduch* took some time, and the Chasam Sofer arrived to beis medresh for Kol Nidrei later than usual. The *gabei* pointed to the clock, hinting that it was late. The Chasam Sofer told him, "It isn't late. Heaven begins the judgment when I say *Kol Nidrei*."

The end of this story gives us a glimpse of the greatness of the Chasam Sofer. Heaven began the judgment when the Chasam Sofer said *Kol Nidrei*. How many people can make such a statement?!

It is also said that the Chasam Sofer's son-in-law saw a pillar of fire in the Chasam Sofer's home on *erev Yom Kippur* and fainted from fright. The Chasam Sofer told him that the pillar of fire was Eliyahu HaNavi. It is almost unnecessary to elaborate on these matters as the greatness of the Chasam Sofer is well renowned.

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

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

Another option is to think, "What good *kabbalah* can I take on for the new year that will help my judgment and tilt the scale in my merit?"

Kol Nidrei

The Or HaChaim Hakadosh writes a letter describing the kedushah of

kol nidrei night. "A wealthy person bought me the honor to take out the *sefer Torah* for *Kol Nidrei*. When I opened the *aron kodesh*, a bright light filled the beis knesses. It was like the gates of Gan Eden opened up."

Kol Nidrei is a special time, an uplifting time. Klal Yisrael says it with awe and passion. They know that this is one of the highest moments of Yom Kippur.

But many wonder: What is so special about *Kol Nidrei* that it deeply touches people's hearts? *Kol Nidrei* is essentially *hataras nedarim*, annulling vows. We also make *hataras nedarim* on *erev Rosh Hashanah*, but that isn't recited with the awe we have at *Kol Nidrei*. What is its significance?

Here are a few explanations:

1) The *Zohar* teaches that by saying *Kol Nidrei*

we annul Hashem's oaths of bringing upon us any harsh decrees due to our sins. Because even if we do *teshuvah* and succeed in rousing Hashem's compassion, what do we do with the oath? Hashem's oath is annulled with the *Kol Nidrei*. We aren't only annulling *our* vows; we are also nullifying Hashem's vows so that He can give us a good year. This is the reason so many Yidden are inspired when they say it.

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

On Yom Kippur, *malachim* and holy *neshamos* come down from heaven to daven together with us, but the *malachim* and the

neshamos don't want to be among sinners. Therefore, we begin Yom Kippur with thoughts of teshuvah, which enable us to daven together with the *malachim*.

3) The Baal Shem Tov zy'a explained that Klal Yisrael knows (in their souls) that as they recite *Kol Nidrei*, the Satan is trying to cause them to sin, and then when they sin, the Satan can testify against them.

The explanation is as follows:

The Gemara (*Yoma* 20.) says, "השטן is *gematriya* 364,

because the Satan has permission to persecute and to incite people to do *aveiros* 364 days a year. On Yom Kippur, which is the 365th day, he must be silent."

The Satan knows that he can't prosecute on Yom Kippur; therefore, when we say *Kol Nidrei*, it is Satan's last chance to slander the Jewish nation or cause them to sin. Klal Yisrael sense that they are in danger, so they do *teshuvah*. This is why we are so inspired to teshuvah when we say *Kol Nidrei*.⁷

7. Otzer Kol Minhagei Yeshurim (31:5) explains that the custom to say *Kol Nidrei* in a crying voice began in Spain at the time of the inquisition. Externally, the Jews lived as *goyim*, but in their homes, they lived as *Yidden*. At that time, they were forced to swear that they believe in the *goyishe* religion, and they had to make vows that they will follow its doctrines. On Yom Kippur, with a broken heart, they annulled all those vows that they were coerced to make to save their lives.

There is also a legend (see Dor v'Dor u'Manhigav p.44) that an *Anus* composed the traditional haunting tune of *Kol Nidrei*. The beginning of the song expresses the emotions of *Anusim* who gathered in a basement on Yom Kippur to pray to the Creator of the world. Then, the tune becomes more forceful. This is when the inquisition finds them and breaks into their concealed synagogue.

The Tune

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

Furthermore, the holy *sefarim* teach that the traditional tunes of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur remove the harsh judgment. One of the translations of the word זמירות is to prune, so (*Tehillim* 47), זמרו לאלקים means the harsh judgment is pruned away with song.

There was once a king whose young son had gone insane and was sent to a mental asylum. The asylum profited from hosting this royal patient, because the king upgraded the services

of the asylum so his son would receive the best care. He built a swimming pool and an exercise room and hired the best psychologists to work there.

His son's condition improved with time, but the asylum directors, not wanting to lose the king's ongoing financial support, didn't tell the king about the prince's progress.

The prince tried to escape from the asylum and go home, but the doors were permanently locked. The prince wrote letters to his parents, but those letters were discarded and never sent.

Once, the king's son scribbled on a page and gave it to one of the directors, asking him to send it to his father. The director was glad to comply because this letter proved

Then the song takes on a solemn tone, expressing the moans and groans of the prisoners of the inquisition, tied in iron chains, being brought to the fire.

that his son still needed help. What normal child of his age sends a scribbled paper to his father?

The directors didn't realize that the prince concealed a hidden message within the illegible message. When the king received the letter, he was disappointed that his son had fallen into such a state, but then he studied it from all angles and picked up on the hidden message. So, he came to the asylum and brought his son home.

This parable explains why we use the specific tunes and melodies on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We say many tefillos to our King, our Father in heaven, but the angels intercept our tefillos and don't let the requests go up to heaven. Therefore, we sing melodies. The *malachim* don't understand their importance, allowing the songs to go up. Concealed within these tunes are our yearnings, regrets, and requests for

the upcoming year. Hashem understands our hidden messages and grants us a good year.

Teshuvah

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

Locked up in prison cells were numerous thieves conspiring and planning to escape. Every night, when the guard wasn't watching, they dug into the ground to create an escape route. When the tunnel was completed, they all fled, except for one man who remained behind in prison. The prison warden hit this man with a stick when he saw him in the cell alone. "Foolish man!" he said. "You were able to escape; why didn't you?"

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

The Rabbeinu Yonah (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 1:2) quotes this Midrash and writes, "Know, when a sinner pushes off doing *teshuvah*, his punishment increases each day. He knows Hashem is angry with him, and he has a place where he can escape- and that place is *teshuvah* - but he remains rebellious. "

One of the discussions found in *teshuvah sefarim* is how to atone for severe aveiros. This is because when someone committed a grave sin, he would ask a gadol what he needed to do to attain a proper *teshuvah* and become pure before Hashem. When we study their responses, we become frightened because they generally require many fasts, afflictions, and humiliations to attain their atonement. The path for atonement that they express is far beyond what anyone can do today.

However, there are more recent *teshuvah sefarim* that discuss these topics,

and they offer far easier paths for attaining atonement.

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

"You asked me about a certain *baal teshuvah* who is now married with children, and he learns in a *kollel* in Yerushalayim. He is cautious with all the mitzvos, and toils in Torah. You asked me to arrange a plan for *teshuvah* for him because until he was eighteen, he didn't keep any mitzvos. His parents aren't religious, and he didn't know anything. During those days, he ate non-kosher, ate on Yom Kippur, and ate chametz on Pesach.

"You quoted the Noda b'Yehudah who says that Torah scholars don't need to afflict themselves so much for their atonement, nevertheless, the Noda b'Yehudah concedes that some fasts and *sigufim* (afflictions) are certainly required so he can have a

complete *teshuvah*, תשובה המשקל. Similarly, the Reishis Chachmah says, הלא הוא לא סגי, that just learning Torah or just afflictions alone isn't enough. It takes a combination of the two to attain complete atonement.

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

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

In this dream, heaven revealed to the Yismach Moshe that *change* itself is the greatest affliction. To do *teshuvah*, one must change his ways. For example, if he was lazy and wasn't cautious to spend his time studying Torah, now he must change his lifestyle and become more diligent in Torah study. If he was accustomed to speaking whatever came to his mind, now he must train himself to keep his mouth closed. These changes are very difficult; they are like *sigufim* (afflictions). The Kotzker zt'l said, "Keeping the Torah is the greatest *siguf* of all." So, one doesn't need to fast or engage in other forms of affliction. The changes he makes on his road to improvement are sufficient because changes are so difficult to achieve.

The Shevet HaLevi explains that the *teshuvah sefarim* that discuss the many days one must fast to atone for his sins refer to a

person who sinned once or twice. He had a weak moment and now seeks to rectify that grave aveirah. But if one is accustomed to sinning, he doesn't need anything other than to improve his ways. The effort he invests to create a lasting change is *yesurim* in its own right.

The Shevet HaLevi writes, "The person you refer to was a תינוק שנשבה, born to irreligious parents, and didn't know anything about Torah, and that's why he committed many *aveiros*. Later, he did *teshuvah*, raised himself above the mire of sin, and

merited to go from level to level, and today he sits and toils in the tents of Torah. He built a holy Jewish family and is cautious with the mitzvos. This is a perfect *teshuvah*, תשובת המשקל based on the lesson from the Yismach Moshe.

"We generally don't learn halachos from dreams, but this time, it is logical and seems correct. I have a lot to add on this subject from many sources in Chazal, however, I decided to end the letter here because I became very afraid as we discuss rectifying sins.⁸ May Hashem see our broken

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

The Torah tells us that Yaakov Avinu saw shepherds with their flocks gathered around a well and asked them why they weren't giving water to their sheep. The shepherds explained that there was a heavy stone on the well, and they weren't strong enough to take it off by themselves. "When all the shepherds arrive, we can roll off the stone."

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

heart and enable us to do *teshuvah sheleimah*.⁹

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

9. There are unfortunately many people who are addicted to the internet, *r'l*. According to the Shevet HaLevi's lesson, it stands to reason, that when they overcome this addiction, they won't require further affliction to attain purity from sin. The difficulty involved in breaking an addiction is a huge affliction.

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

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

Ten months later they had their first child.

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

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

"It must have been my imagination," the *bachur* decided, and he picked up the book again. Once again, he saw a man brandishing

a sword. He put the book down and went to sleep.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A strong, young lad was chosen for the position.

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

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

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

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

"I will have all passengers to get off the wagon, and together we will push the wagon out of the mud."

"And if that doesn't work?"

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

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

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

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

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

The old wagon driver replied, "An experienced wagon driver won't drive his wagon into the mud in the first place."

Similarly, regarding *teshuvah*, there are ways to rectify the past, but it is a difficult route. It is far better not to fall into sin in the first place.

The same applies to relationships. Erev Yom Kippur, we ask *mechilah*, and sometimes, we must ask *mechilah* from family members. A breach in the peace of the family is easy to create and so hard to amend. Fortunate are those who never get into that situation in the first place.

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

Kabbalos

Part of the teshuvah process is to make a *kabbalah*, an undertaking to do a certain good deed in the upcoming year. The *kabbalah* can be something minor, and it is advised that it should be something small and easy to keep because then there is a better chance of keeping it for a long time. If it is hard to do, chances are it won't last.

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

Rebbe Shmelke of Nikelsburg *zt'l* explains, שובה ישראל, do *teshuvah*, עד, up to a certain point. Don't

take on too much at once because you will fall from your resolve.

The main thing is to keep your *kabbalah* under all circumstances, without compromise.

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

There was an alcoholic who resolved never to drink alcohol again.

He made this *kabbalah* at night, and true to his word, he didn't have his usual late-night drink. In the morning, he craved a beer and began walking toward the bar, but he stopped midway. "I can't do this," he told himself. "I'm a new

The Tzemech Tzedek of Lubavitz *zy'a* asked: Why do people buy running horses? I understand that there is a benefit of a fast horse, because if it is going in the right direction, you will get to your destination quicker. But sometimes, the horse is running in the wrong direction, and a fast horse will get you to the wrong place quicker.

The answer is: A fast horse will also bring you back more swiftly, to your destination. Because even if you strayed far, you can return quickly.

person. I'm not an alcoholic anymore," and returned home.

In the afternoon, he walked all the way to the bar, but then he caught himself and returned home.

By nighttime, he complimented himself. He said, "Today, I controlled myself all day. I had four or five difficult tests, but I was strong like iron and kept my resolve. For this, I deserve a reward," and he went to the bar to celebrate.

Often our *teshuvah* looks the same. We resolve to improve in some area, we are successful sometimes, and then we pat ourselves on the shoulder and drop our guard, and promptly revert to our old ways. Instead, we need to make a firm decision, once and for

all, and then we will succeed with our *teshuvah*.¹⁰

Regret

We aren't 100% guilty for our bad deeds. We have many excuses, and Hashem might accept them. Just think about the powerful *yetzer hara*, negative human tendencies, bad habits, negative influences around us, and more, and we understand that sinning is almost inevitable. However, Hashem asks, "I understand that you failed. I understand that you erred. After all, you are human, and the test is very great. But why don't you regret what you did? Why are you placid, feeling that all is well? You should at least regret your sins."

Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa *zt'l* taught that on Rosh Hashanah and

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

Yom Kippur, we are judged primarily to see whether we regret our *aveiros*.

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

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

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

People regret their *aveiros* for several reasons (fear of punishment, embarrassment, a feeling of failure and incompetence, etc.). Still, the ideal regret is to feel bad, שחטאנו לפניך, that we sinned to Hashem. "How could I have sinned to Hashem, whose greatness and kindness are boundless?"¹¹

11. The Beis Yisrael *zt'l* was very strict about engaging in idle talk in his beis medresh.

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

The other said, "It wasn't my fault. The other bachur spoke to me. He caused me to speak." The Beis Yisrael responded that now he

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

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

He decided to go to Rebbe Bunim together with a group of chassidim. He would stand on the side and receive the Rebbe's

brachah without drawing attention to himself.

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

At that moment, Rebbe Henoah's humiliation and shame left him. He thought, "The Rebbe wants me. So, I'm not all that bad." As he approached the Rebbe, Rebbe Bunim told him that it wasn't necessary anymore, and he could go.

Rebbe Henoah understood: When he was humble and broken from his sins, he was on a very special level, and Rebbe Bunim wanted something from him. Perhaps he wanted his tefillos, his

shouldn't return to the beis medresh for six weeks!

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

brachos; he had a lot of potential then. But when he felt arrogance, he lost that level, and the Rebbe sent him on his way.¹²

Happy with the Atonement

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

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* teaches:

We think we do *teshuvah*, but to a large extent, Hashem does everything.

Hashem puts into our hearts the desire to do *teshuvah*, and He helps us in its process.

Teshuvah brings salvation, even the coming of Mashiach. The Chasam Sofer asks: Why do we deserve salvation? Why should we deserve Mashiach if we are not the ones who do the *teshuvah* if Hashem did the *teshuvah*?

The answer is: We are rewarded for being happy that Hashem is guiding us on the path of *teshuvah*. We are happy that we are becoming better and more loyal to Him and are rewarded for our joy.

12. However, if the regret is so severe that one can't function or is at risk of falling into depression, he will be better off ignoring the aveirah he committed.

A girl from a good home committed severe aveiros and her conscience didn't give her respite. She got to the point that she was having suicidal thoughts. The Chazon Ish sent her the following message: "Chazal say 'Thinking about aveiros is worse than the aveirah.' This means thinking about the sins of your past is worse than doing them. You need to stop thinking about your *aveiros*..." She followed his counsel, recovered from her depression, and went on to build a *bayis ne'eman b'Yisrael*.

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

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

It states (*Tehillim* 14:7), מי יתן מציון ישועת ישראל בשוב ה' שבות עמו יגל יעקב ישמח ישראל. The Chasam Sofer explains that Dovid HaMelech is asking, מי יתן מציון ישועת ישראל, why do we deserve *yeshuos*? Although we do *teshuvah*, behold, בשוב ה' שבות עמו, it is Hashem who is guiding us on the path of *teshuvah*. We aren't doing anything!

The answer is: יגל יעקב ישמח ישראל, we are happy that Hashem is bringing us to the path of *teshuvah*. For that, we deserve *yeshuos* and the upcoming redemption.

Rebbe Moshe Kobriner *zt'l* explained the following words that we say in *tachanun*:

הפותח יד בתשובה לקבל פושעים וחטאים, Hashem stretches out His hand to accept the sinners who do *teshuvah*. נבהלה נפשינו, we are shocked and surprised at ourselves, מרוב עצבוננו, that we are sad. Why are we sad? We should be the happiest people in the world because Hashem wants our *teshuvah*! Hashem is also happy with our atonement.

It states (*Tehillim* 139:16), יומם יצרו ולו אחד בהם "Hashem created days, and one of the days is Hashem's." *Tana d'Bei Eliyahu* (ch.1) writes that this refers to Yom Kippur. It is Hashem's day because He is so happy with our atonement.

The *Tana d'Bei Eliyahu* writes, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave this day to the Jewish nation with love and joy. There is a *mashal* given of servants who were cleaning the king's palace.

When the king went outside, he saw all the garbage that was thrown out, and he was extremely happy. This is how it is on Yom Kippur when Hashem forgives the sins of the Jewish nation. He's extremely joyous. Hashem says 'Rejoice immensely because I am forgiving the sins of the Jewish people.'"

The Midrash (*Tana d'Bei Eliyahu Zuta*, end of ch.4) states, "Moshe went up on Har Sinai for forty days. On the fortieth day [Yom Kippur], the Jewish nation decreed a fast day. The fast began at night, and in the morning, they went towards Har Sinai. They were crying as they came toward Moshe, and Moshe was crying as he came towards them. Their cries went up before Hashem, and Hashem's compassion was aroused, and He accepted their *teshuvah*. Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, 'Bnei Yisrael! I swear by My name and by My throne that your tears will become tears of

immense joy. This day will be a day for atonement for you, for your children, and your grandchildren, for all generations.'"

The Potential of *Teshuvah*

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

Reb Baruch Ber *zt'l* (*Birchas Shmuel*) excelled in the mitzvah of honoring his parents, and when his father was ill, he stayed with his father almost every night. One night, Reb Baruch Ber couldn't be with his father, and he appointed someone to take care of him. Unfortunately, his father was *niftar* that night. Reb Baruch Ber berated himself for not being more devoted. "If I were with my father on that night, perhaps he wouldn't have died," he rebuked himself.

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

He went to Radin to seek encouragement from the Chofetz Chaim *zt'l*. The Chofetz Chaim told him, "When one does *teshuvah*, he becomes a brand-new person. He isn't the same person who sinned. This is the reason *teshuvah* atones. He isn't the person who committed the *aveirah*." Reb Baruch Ber came out of the Chofetz Chaim's house dancing. He shouted, "I'm a new Baruch Ber! I'm a new person!"

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

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

Another aspect of the power of *teshuvah* is that it can turn an *aveirah* into a *mitzvah*. This is stated in the Gemara (*Yoma* 86.) גדולה תשובה שזדונוֹת נעשות לו כזיוֹת, "*Teshuvah* is great because the *aveiros* become his merits." There are different explanations for how this works, but that is the reality. When one does *teshuvah* because he loves Hashem, the *aveirah* turns around and is among his good deeds.

The Bardichiver Rav *zt'l* said to a great sinner, "I am jealous of you because when you do *teshuvah*, you will have so many *mitzvot*." The man replied, "Just wait another year, and you will have more reason to be jealous."

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

Reb Chaim Dovid Doctor replied, "*Chas veshalom!* I'm not *mevater* on a single day!" Reb Chaim Dovid Doctor didn't want to lose one day of his life, not even those days when he was irreligious. Because since he did *teshuvah*, his previous days were counted among his merits.

Rebbe Yitzchak Meir of Zinikov *zt'l* met someone

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

The *Navi* (*Yirmiyahu* 50:20) discusses the era of Mashiach and states, ובעת ההיא נאום ה', יבוקש את עוון ישראל ואיננו ואת חטאת יהודה ולא תמצאנה כי "In those days and at that time, says Hashem, the sins of Israel will be sought out, but it won't be there. And [they will search for] the sins of Yehudah, but they will not find, for I will forgive those I leave over." It seems from this *pasuk* that people will be searching for sins. Why?

The Apter Rav *zt'l* explained that every *aveirah* is a zero. When one repents out of love, the *teshuvah* is a number, and you place that number before the zeros, and it becomes a huge, significant number. In the future, people will look for sins because the

aveiros will increase our merits and virtues."¹³

Viduy

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

Every mitzvah should be performed with joy, and therefore, *viduy* should be said joyously. This explains why אֲשַׁמְנוּ and אֵל הַטָּא are

said with a tune. The joy is because we know that with this *viduy*, we are coming close to Hashem.¹⁴

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

Rebbe Zusha of Hanipoli *zt'l* would say, "If the Jewish nation hadn't sinned, where would Hakadosh Baruch Hu get a וְנִסְלָה such as the Jewish

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

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

The Rebbe replied, "It is also written (*Yeshayah* 60:21), וְעַמְךָ כֹּלֵם צְדִיקִים, all Yidden are *tzaddikim*. I think it will be more beneficial for you to look at yourself." He was hinting to him to look over his deeds and see where he can improve. That will accomplish even more.

14. The Maharal (*Nesivos Olam*) explains that we become very close to Hashem when we say *viduy*. He compares this to when one kneels before his fellow man to ask forgiveness. The man he is speaking to bends down to hear what he is saying, and their faces are very close. This represents the very close connection between Hashem and the Yid when he says *viduy* and asks for forgiveness.

nation says on Yom Kippur night, with a tune and with an outpouring of the soul?"

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

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

Imagine this scenario, and then say the *viduy* of Yom Kippur.

Immediate Atonement

When you ask for forgiveness, Hashem forgives you right away. You don't have to wait a week or a month, and you don't need *yesurim*, and you also don't need many *tefillos*. When you ask Hashem for forgiveness, Hashem forgives you. It is as simple as that.

The Baal HaTanya (*Igeres HaTeshuvah* 11) proves this from the brachah *סלח לנו* in *Shemonah Esrei*. Immediately after we request Hashem to forgive us, we thank Hashem for doing so, as we say, *ברוך אתה ה' חנון המרבה לסלוח*.

The Baal HaTanya writes, "Every day in *Shemonah Esrei* we ask Hashem to forgive us, as we say, *סלח לנו*. After that, we immediately say, *ברוך אתה ה' חנון המרבה לסלוח*. But behold, when one is in

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

The Noam Elimelech *zy'a* writes, "The Torah teaches us to say *viduy* with confidence in Hashem's compassion and belief that Hashem will forgive our sins. One shouldn't say *viduy* with sadness and *yeush*, as this brings on *denim*, rather say *viduy* with *bitachon*. Trust that He will forgive you. As it states (*Mishlei* 28:13), ומודה ועוזב ירוחם, 'He who confesses and abandons [sin] will obtain mercy.'"

Bilaam also said *viduy*. When he saw the *malach* standing before him, he

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

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

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

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

The Reishis Chachmah explains that it is important

to begin *viduy* with *הטאתי*, because this word removes the *mekatreg* (the Satan who proclaims our sins). If we were to start by telling our *aveiros*, the Satan could go up to heaven and say, "Listen to what he's saying. He himself says that he sinned." But after we said *הטאתי*, the Satan is silenced. He can't speak out against us. So now we can say *viduy* in the order of the *alef beis*.

In the era of the Beis HaMikdash there was a mitzvah called *viduy maasros*, to go to the *beis hamikdash* twice in seven years to proclaim that we observed all the halachos of *maasar*, *terumah*, and the likes. Surprisingly, this mitzvah is called **viduy maasros**, since we are announcing that we *kept the halachos*, not confessing that we have sinned.

For example, by *viduy maasros* one says, *לא עברתי*, *ומצותך ולא שכחתי* "I didn't transgress your mitzvos and I didn't forget" (*Devarim*

26:13). Why are these words called *viduy* (confessions)?

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

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

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

Reb Chaim Volozhiner *zt'l* traveled to his son's *chasunah* and stopped in the middle of the way to daven *shacharis*. It was a

day that the Torah was read, but the beis medresh he was in didn't have a *sefer Torah*. Reb Chaim asked the Rav about that, and he replied, "The closest *sefer Torah* is far from here. We aren't obligated to go there to hear the reading of the *sefer Torah*."

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

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

While he was saying *viduy* for this transgression, the police arrived with the stolen *sefer Torah*. They had found the thief. There is a rule: when one says *viduy*, the sins are removed. And when there aren't sins, the

problems that the sin caused are resolved.

On Yom Kippur, we say *viduy* with אשמונו and we say *viduy* with the אאל חטא. But we find it surprising why there isn't an אאל חטא for *bitul Torah*. *Bitul Torah* is from the severest *aveiros*, we would assume that there be an אאל חטא specifically about this topic.

The Sfas Emes *zt'l* answers that *bitul Torah* is stated in the אאל חטא. We say, אאל חטא שחטאנו לפניך בבלי דעת, "For the sin that we committed before you without knowledge." The Sfas Emes says that here we are repenting that we committed *aveiros* because we didn't know the *Torah's halachos and ways*. The reason we didn't know is because we didn't study Torah. So, ultimately, this is a *viduy* for *bitul Torah*.

Furthermore, we say, אאל חטא שחטאנו לפניך בפריקת עול, "For the sin that we committed before you by throwing off the yoke [of Heaven]." The

Sfas Emes writes that when one doesn't study Torah, this can be called casting off the yoke of Heaven.

So, two al chets discuss bitul Torah.

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

There was a home that was very dirty. The homeowner tried to clean it many times but was never successful. He finally came up with a plan that would help solve this problem. He would invite the king to visit his home. Obviously, the king wouldn't enter a dirty house, so his servants came to his home before the visit to clean up and prepare for the royal arrival. The man gained doubly: He hosted the king, and his house was cleaned.

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

This seems to be the intention of the Mishnah (end of *Yoma*), אמר ר' עקיבא אשריכם ישראל לפני מי אתם מטהרים ומי מטהר אתכם אביכם שבשמים, "Yisrael, you are fortunate! Before Whom do you purify yourselves? It's your Father in heaven!"¹⁵ On Yom Kippur, we stand before Hashem, which is the root of our atonement.

Neilah

The Mishnah Berurah writes, "One should be very *zariz* with *Neilah* because the purpose of the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah is

15. One year, before *Ne'ilah*, students heard Reb Yechezkel Levenstein repeat this Mishnah to himself many times because this Mishnah refers to the purity from sin that occurs on Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur and the purpose of Yom Kippur is *Neilah*, for everything is dependent on the closure (הכל הולך אחר החיתום)."

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

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

The explanation is as follows:

The *Yerushalmi* explains that there isn't forgiveness for *chillul Hashem* because if someone disgraced Hashem's honor, who will dare speak up in the

person's defense? Which malach will be so brazen to say that the sin isn't so severe? To say that is equivalent to saying that it wasn't so severe to disgrace the King of the world, and that itself is a *chillul Hashem*. Therefore, when a *chillul Hashem* case is brought to heaven's courts, all malachim are silent, and none of them plead for the person's benefit.

However, at *Neilah*, the *malachim* aren't part of the judgment process. Hashem alone judges us, and when we plead before Him and try to excuse ourselves for the *chillul Hashem* we caused, He will forgive us.

The Ramchal writes that at *Neilah*, one can attain the level of Adam HaRishon before his sin. It is a time when we can become completely pure before Hashem. All sins, including the severe aveirah of *chillul Hashem* can be removed.

Wishing all of Klal Yisrael a *גמר חתימה טובה*!