

**דרכים
בשנה
יום הכפורים**

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ושבת עד ה' אלוקיך

And you will return unto Hashem your G-d

One of the biggest questions we have on Yom Kippur is also one of the simplest: What does teshuvah really accomplish? We all know our mistakes. We know the things we wish we could have done differently, the opportunities we missed, and the places where we allowed ourselves to drift. But can we really repair what happened? Can we actually undo the distance that our actions created between ourselves and Hashem?

The Mabit, in his sefer Beis Elokim, gives us a different understanding of what teshuvah is all about. When a person sins, there are two consequences. There is the punishment that comes as a result of the aveirah, but there is something deeper. By transgressing Hashem's command, a person has also created distance in his relationship with Hashem. Teshuvah is not simply about escaping punishment. It is about repairing that relationship and coming close to Hashem once again.

Our entire purpose is to be close to Hashem, as the Torah says, “ואתם הדבקים בה' אלוקיכם” - “And you shall cling to Hashem your G-d.” The goal of teshuvah, therefore, is to bridge the gap that our actions have created. The Mabit points out something remarkable in the

words of the pasuk, “ושבת עד ה' אלוקיך.” The word “עד,” meaning “until,” teaches that when teshuvah is done properly, a person can return “עד ה'” - until Hashem Himself. We are not simply moving in the right direction. We can actually return to a place of closeness.

This gives us a new understanding of the words we say on Yom Kippur: “כי ביום הזה ה' יכפר עליכם לטהר אתכם מכל חטאתיכם לפני ה'.” The Torah does not merely tell us that Yom Kippur cleanses us from our sins. It adds the words “לפני ה'” - before Hashem. The purpose is to once again stand before Hashem. We are not spending these twenty-four hours merely trying to erase a record of mistakes. We are trying to repair a relationship and come back to the One we may have become distant from.

And there is something even more incredible about teshuvah. Chazal tell us that teshuvah preceded the creation of the world. Let's think about this for a moment. Before there was a person who could sin, there was already teshuvah. Before there was a mistake, there was already a way back.

We often look at our past and think, “How am I ever going to get back to where I was?” Sometimes a person has been struggling with the same thing for years, and the history itself becomes discouraging. He looks at how many times he has tried, how many times he has failed, and begins to believe that this is simply who he is.

But that is not how Hakadosh Baruch Hu designed the world. The road home existed before we ever left home. The possibility of returning was built into the [briah](#) (creation)

itself. Teshuvah is not some emergency mechanism that Hashem had to create after mankind began making mistakes. It was there from the very beginning.

This might be one of the greatest gifts of Yom Kippur. We spend the day looking honestly at where we went wrong, but Hashem asks us to look in the other direction as well. There really is a road back.

“ושבת עד ה' אלוֹקֶיךָ.” We can come back. Not merely back to being a better person, and not merely back to avoiding another aveirah. We can come back “עד ה'” - until Hashem.

The question on Yom Kippur is not whether we can become the person we wish we had always been. The question is whether we are willing to take that road, the road of teshuvah that was created before we ever needed it, and once again stand “לפני ה'.”

והיתה זאת לכם לחקת עולם לכפר על בני ישראל מכל חטאתם אחת בשנה ויעש כאשר צוה ה' את משה (ויקרא ט"ז:ל"ד)

“This shall be to you a chok for all time: to make atonement for the Bnei Yisroel for all their sins once a year. And Moshe did as Hashem had commanded him” (16:34)

As the *pasuk* describes the greatness of the day of Yom Kippur, the Torah characterizes it as a “once a year” occurrence. It is a day that is special and unique, and if it is not taken advantage of, then very soon – כי פנה היום – the day will slip away and the great opportunity will be lost. Just as the Kohen Gadol only entered לפני ולפנים once a year,

wearing his בגדי בד – his white, linen garments – so too, we enter into the holiest moments wearing our white clothing as well. As we do so, we picture ourselves entering inside a place where literally everything is on the line, just as it was for the Kohen Gadol. We must enter fully prepared to receive – and be completely willing to accept the great gift that Hashem is shining upon us during these twenty-four hours.

There is an interesting lesson that we can learn from the *begadim* of the Kohen Gadol. The *pasuk* says: **ובא אהרן אל אוהל מועד ופשט את בגדי הבד אשר לבש בבאו אל הקודש והניחו שם – And Aharon shall come into the Ohel Moed and take off the linen garments he wore when he entered the Kodesh HaKadashim, and leave them there (16:23).**

Rashi comments that the *begadim* were locked away, never to be used again. The Seforno explains that because these *begadim* were used inside of the *Kodesh HaKadashim*, it would be improper to use them again for something else. מעלין בקודש ואין מורידין – when it comes to holiness, we must always go up, and never downwards. Therefore, to use them for another task, even a holy one, would be a downgrade.

Based on this rule, the following question presents itself: Why must we put away the *begadim* to never be used again? Can't we allow the Kohen Gadol to wear them again on the following Yom Kippur, as this would not be a downgrade in the level of *kedushah*? Rav Gifter zt"l (Pirkei Torah) explains that man's nature is such that the

second time he performs a task, he does not do it with the same energy and feeling as the very first time. The Torah is worried that if the Kohen Gadol were to wear the same garments as he wore the previous year, upon entering the *Kodesh HaKadashim* he may experience a one-thousandth of a percent of familiarity. Such feelings could be a serious impediment to Klal Yisroel obtaining a full *kaparah*, and may also be tantamount to downgrading the clothing in their level of holiness. Thus, each and every year required brand new *begadim*.

If we think about the circumstances for a moment, we can understand the novelty a bit more. The Kohen Gadol had the fate of the entire Klal Yisroel on his shoulders. Furthermore, his family's life and livelihood depended on his mission as well. More daunting yet was the fact that his own life hung in the balance. If we look at the history of the Beis Hamikdash, we learn that during the 420 years of the *Bayis Sheini*, more than 300 Kohanim Gedolim served. This means that for the majority of the years, the Kohen Gadol did not make it through the year. During all the years, there were only four righteous Kohanim Gedolim. With this perspective in mind, even a hint of "been there, done that" would be seriously detrimental.

Similarly, from our own seats in shul, we must realize that last year's judgement on Yom Kippur is no guarantee at all for what this year brings. One should not fall into the trap of the Satan's voice telling us that there

is no need to be so serious because last year was fine and this time it will be swell as well. Perhaps we can offer another answer to our original question of why the Kohen is not allowed to wear the same *begadim* the following year. Possibly, the rule of *maalin bakodesh ve'ain moridin* is teaching us that even if the same exact level can indeed be obtained the following year, it is merely a lateral move. It is not enough to keep moving sideways; we must constantly move upwards. Only a fool would purchase a stock that does not grow, and we too should not be satisfied without accomplishing new things. If we are not growing, we are slowing. Did we grow in the previous year? Even regarding our good deeds – do we plan on doing the same things again or will we try and pick it up a notch or two?

**כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם לטהר אתכם מכל
הטאתיכם לפני ה'**

"For on this day He will make atonement for you, to cleanse you, from all your sins before Hashem"

The Gemara in Maseches Sukkah (52a) explains the nature of the *yetzer hara*: אמר רב אסי יצר הרע בתחילה דומה לחוט של בוכיא ולבסוף אסי יצר הרע בתחילה דומה לחוט של בוכיא ולבסוף – *Rav Asi said: Initially, when it begins to entice someone, the yetzer hara is like a strand of a spider's web [buchya]; and ultimately it is like the thick ropes of a wagon.* Initially, the enticement is almost imperceptible, like a thin strand of a cobweb that can easily be brushed aside; however, after one sins, it is like wagon ropes tied tightly around him.

The Gemara offers many more analogies: (52b) אמר רבא בתחלה קראו הלך ולבסוף קראו אורח – Rava said: Initially, the *pasuk* called the *yetzer hara* a traveler coming from afar. Subsequently, the *pasuk* calls it a guest, as one welcomes it. Ultimately, the *pasuk* calls it man, indicating significance, as it becomes the *balabus* in one's own home.

The nature of a passerby is that he has no rights or claims on anything in your home. A guest at least has an invitation to be there, but still must be on his best behavior. The owner of the home is the one that is fully in control. The recurring theme in the Gemara is that what begins as a casual, non-threatening occurrence graduates into a full-blown life of its own, fully controlling its captive.

The *seforim* explain that Yom Kippur is the opportunity to gaze at the brilliant light that Hakadosh Boruch Hu shines upon us as we cleanse ourselves, finally releasing the strong grasp that the *yetzer hara* has us in. Through this day, we can become new people that are no longer bound by the shackles that tied us down. We can disconnect from our previous actions and proclivities. Yom Kippur is the proverbial pressing of the hard reset button.

We find this concept in Parshas Vayeira. Upon hearing the news that she will have a child, Sarah Imeinu laughs. When questioned, she denies having reacted that way. The Kotzker Rebbe *zt"l* asked: How can we understand Sarah Imeinu's response? After all, the Torah clearly states that she laughed. This is not the type of behavior that one would expect from a matriarch!

The Kotzker explained that when Sarah was asked why she laughed, her response was, "I am not connected to the Sarah that did that action. That was someone else." As one of the *Imahos*, Sarah displayed a lightning-fast *teshuvah*. More importantly, she teaches us the importance of moving on, and not living in the past.

What happens the day after Yom Kippur? We will go to wherever it is that our schedule takes us and surely, we will only see and hear beautiful things. Without a doubt, the *yetzer hara* will have been vanquished forever. But alas, that is not the case. He is once again right there waiting for us, laying down the exact same traps.

But what about the whole *shmuess* we just discussed? What did Yom Kippur accomplish? What about the *taharah* and transformation we all went through?

Rav Yosef Elefant *shlit"a* beautifully explained as follows: On that first day, when the *yetzer hara* showed up as a traveler – when we saw a hanging thread that looked like a mere cobweb – we were in control. It is true that temptation was there, but we were calling the shots. We could have easily told the visitor that he is no longer welcome and should not come back again. The cobwebs as well would have been so easy to clean up and say goodbye to. But we didn't; we completely lost control, allowing the snowball effect to run us over time and again.

The day after Yom Kippur we are once again in control and can easily say no to all temptations. Once again, the *yetzer hara* will appear – but only as a thin strand, a mere

passerby. The only question that remains is – will we welcome it in this year as we may have in the past, or will this year be different, and we will brush it aside – maintaining full control?

אור זרוע לצדיק

“A light is sown for the Righteous”

Kol Nidrei night has finally come; it is now the moment that we have all been waiting for. The Yom HaDin that we have all eagerly counted towards is upon us. The shul is full and the *chazzan* stands at the *bimah* flanked by the Rav and another prominent member of the *kehillah*, both holding *sifrei torah*, all dressed in white. By now, emotions are running high, as every member of Klal Yisroel has finished forgiving each other and wishing one another a sweet new year. It is at this point that the *chazzan* begins his intro to the Kol Nidrei with the holy words אור זרוע לצדיק – *“A light is sown for the Righteous.”*

What can we learn from these *heiligh* words that will inspire us to truly live a better life, and why is this *pasuk* recited just before the awesome moment of Kol Nidrei?

Rashi and the Radak (Tehillim 97) explain that the reward for *mitzvos* and the personal perfection that is their result is like seeds sown in fertile soil. This is an optimistic message of inspiration that can be focused on as we prepare to climb the “*Har Hashem*” this coming year.

Perhaps we can offer another explanation that will connect Kol Nidrei with these words:

The Pirkei D’Rabi Eliezer shares with us the incredible story of what transpired with Yonah while he was inside of the fish during those three days. It was as if he had walked into a huge shul. The eyes of the fish were like the glass windows, all lit up brilliantly like the sun, with a dazzling stone hanging from its innards providing a special light. Upon the stone, the words אור זרוע לצדיק – *“A light is sown for the Righteous”* – were written. Through that stone he was able to see everything in the Lower and Upper Worlds.

There are a few parallels that we can mention. At this point, Yonah announced that נדרתי – *“What I have vowed, I will fulfill.”* For now, our first connection with this is that we say *Ohr Zarua* leading into Kol Nidrei to think of Yonah’s final decision to keep his *neder/vow*.

Although on a basic level this fits well, there have been many other great people that have kept their word. Perhaps there is a deeper lesson.

The Abarbanel tells us that Yonah’s entrance into the stomach of the fish is reminiscent of a baby’s existence in the mother’s womb; Yonah was being reborn at that moment.

The Gemara in Maseches Niddah (30b) teaches that a candle is lit above the head of the fetus which allows the baby to look from one end of the world to the other. We also know from the Gemara in Maseches Chagigah (12a) that the original light of the world carried this same feature. However, that light was hidden away for the *Tzaddikim le’osid lavo*. From here we can derive that it was this very light that Yonah in his rebirth

was utilizing; hence the *pasuk*, אור זרוע – לצדיק – “*A light is sown for the Righteous*” – referring to this special light that is reserved for the *tzaddik*.

The Gemara in Maseches Niddah (30b) also tells of the very first *shvuah*/oath that each and every one of us take. We are all adjured to swear that we will be a *tzaddik* and not a *rasha*.

I would like to suggest that as we enter into the holiest moment of the year, angelic and completely pure, we are reminded of these events. We are told, אור זרוע לצדיק – at our very beginning, we looked into the light that is reserved for the *tzaddik*, envisioning a glimpse of the possibility of what our future may entail. We then say the Kol Nidrei; at that moment, we are reminded that while looking into the candle, we made a promise to strive to greatness, righteousness and holiness. These were the dreams, hopes and aspirations of each and every one of us before coming into this world.

כי אדם אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב ולא יחטא – *For there is no righteous man on earth who does good and sins not (Koheles 7:20)*. But of course, life happens. Dreams are dashed and promises are broken. The clouds form and our clarity is gone with the wind.

It is precisely now, at the clearest moment of the year, that we are told “gaze again at that light.” Let the light of the *tzaddikim* be a vision of greatness that is within our reach and can be achieved. The goals that we set shall not just be enough to get us by; we must think big! We must think *tzidkus*.

Let us keep in mind that Hashem only asks us to make this promise because He knows that we can.

This year, let us not sell ourselves short by taking aim at a goal that is low. Let us set our sights on greatness – and in that case, as the saying goes, “Shoot for the moon, and even if you miss, you will land among the stars.”

וסמך אהרן את שתי ידיו על ראש השעיר החי
והתודה עליו את כל עונת בני ישראל ואת כל
פשעיהם לכל חטאתם ונתן אתם על ראש
השעיר ושלה ביד איש עתי המדברה

“*And Aharon shall lean both of his hands [forcefully] upon the live he-goat's head and confess upon it all the willful transgressions of the Bnei Yisrael, all their rebellions, and all their unintentional sins, and he shall place them on the he-goat's head, and send it off to the desert with a timely man*” (16:21)

The *pesukim* discuss the *avodah* of Yom Kippur performed by the Kohen Gadol. One of the more enigmatic rituals was the *sa'ir la'Azazel* – the “scapegoat” sent into the desert by the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur.

In fact, there were two male goats featured in the *avodah* of Yom Kippur. Ideally, they would be similar in appearance, height and value, and purchased together in a single transaction (Mishnah Yoma 6:1). The first goat is brought as a *chatas* – a national sin-offering. The Kohen Gadol then says *vidui*/confession for Klal Yisroel on the second goat, which is then escorted out to the

desert by a designated person (the “*ish iti*”) who pushes it off a cliff to its death.

The entire *avodah* defies easy explanation, and many *meforshim* discuss its meaning and what we are meant to learn from it.

According to the Kli Yakar, these two goats allude to the two goats prepared by Rivka for Yaakov in order to receive the *brachos* from Yitzchok (Bereshis 27:9).

Similarly, the Abarbanel compares the two goats to Yaakov and Esav, signifying that two brothers can be raised in the same home with the exact same values, and ultimately proceed on divergent paths in life, depending on the choices they make. This *parshah* should serve as a warning that choosing the right path in life is not at all an easy task and requires vigilance. (Rav Shmshon Refoel Hirsch notes that the *goral*/lottery by which each goat was selected for its chosen *avodah* alludes to the ability of man to choose between good and evil.)

Another part of the *avodah* was the sending of the goat with the designated person (“*ish iti*”) who would then push it off a cliff to its death. This was done with great fanfare as the *ish iti* would be accompanied by the most important people of Yerushalayim (*Yakirei Yerushalayim*), pausing along the way from one hut to another.

It is interesting that these great people would accompany him on the holy day of Yom Kippur, almost as if they had nothing better to do with their time. Wasn't this the most exciting day to be a spectator at the Beis Hamikdash? Only once a year could one see the way the Kohen Gadol ran to and fro,

changing from one set of garments to another and immersing in the *mikvah* five different times, burning of the *ketores* and offering the *korban*; this was true glory and purity being performed in front of everyone's eyes; surely no one wanted to miss it! Think of all the *hisorerus* that one could glean from such a sight. And yet, these people went to accompany the *ish iti* so that he should not go alone. This underscores the unmatched importance of *chesed*, which is seemingly greater than even witnessing the *avodah* on Yom Kippur. At the same time, it gives us an insight as to why these people were called the “*Yakirei Yerushalayim*” (Lachzos B'noam Hashem).

Perhaps we can suggest another *limud* from here. This person was called *ish iti* because he was designated for this purpose. These people went along with him to teach us that any person that truly fulfills their mission can be just as great as a Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur.

It may indeed be true that Reuven does not possess Shimon's talents, but he must know that he is also not expected to accomplish Shimon's mission. As the famous story goes: The famed Rebbe, Reb Zusha of Hannipoli, was on his deathbed, surrounded by his *chassidim*. He was crying bitterly and no one could comfort him. One *chassid* asked him: “Rebbe, Why do you cry? You were almost as wise as Moshe and as kind as Avraham.” Reb Zusha answered: “When I pass from this world and appear before the Beis Din Shel Ma'aloh (Heavenly Tribunal), they won't ask me, ‘Zeesha, why weren't you as wise as

Moshe or as kind as Avraham' – rather, they will ask me, 'Zeesha, why weren't you Zeesha?' Why didn't I fulfill my potential, why didn't I follow the path that could have been mine? That is why I am crying."

One last *limud* from the *ish iti* is that while being accompanied by the others, he would stop by in various huts along the way. Perhaps this can be a lesson for us when we are attempting to rid ourselves of a negative behavior or trait. Each step of the way, we must check to make sure that our motives are correct and that the mission will be accomplished without missing anything. Furthermore, sometimes the job is so dangerous that we must ask others to stay involved so that we don't become harmed along the way.

ויאמר ה' סלחתי כדברך

"And Hashem said, 'I have forgiven according to your words'"

Throughout the *selichos* and *davening*, we recite the *pasuk* that Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Moshe Rabbeinu at the climax of his appeal for forgiveness on behalf of Klal Yisroel numerous times. This *pasuk* bears such great importance that it is set right at the beginning of the Yom Kippur *davening*. In essence, what we are saying is that just as Hashem forgave Klal Yisroel then, we hope that He will forgive us this Yom Kippur as well.

Let us think back for a moment to a time when we were children in shul right before Yom Kippur. We would run over to our friends and with a half-smile, and ask the age-

old "Are you moichel me?" and they would respond, "Sure." Then we would run to the next friend and do the same, perhaps not really thinking about why we may be asking for *mechilah*. If we are being honest with ourselves, we may wonder, "How much is that forgiveness really worth?" I am not suggesting that it's pointless, but my assumption is that this would not be enough if true and proper *mechilah* was necessary. Perhaps we can say that the *mechilah* is worth as much as the thought that went into the request.

Similarly, on Yom Kippur, at the time when we ask Hashem to forgive us for our actions, we should keep this in mind. ויאמר ה' סלחתי כדברך— *And Hashem said, "I have forgiven according to your words."* 'According to your words' – if our request is a sincere request, the response will be a sincere response. However, if our entire approach is lackadaisical and insincere, the response will indeed be "according to your words."

It is up to us to set up the manner in which we want Hashem to respond.

May we all be sealed in the Sifran Shel Tzaddikim, and may we all be zoche to a year of bracha, hatzlacha, and good health. A Gut Gebentched Yur, and a Gmar Chasima Tova,

מרדכי ע. אפפער