

YOM KIPPUR

The common misconception is that in Judaism just like any other religion or culture, we have holidays to commemorate past events. For example we celebrate Pesach to remember what happened when we left Egypt. However, while remembering how we became free is a part of the Pesach holiday, it is not primary. In Judaism, the timeline is circular. What does this mean? It means that every year at different times of the year we go through the same things. Imagine all the months of the Jewish calendar in a circle now imagine going around the circle every year over and over again. Every year we experience the special energies that are associated with that month or time of year. For example the ninth of Av is a time where Din (judgment) is very severe therefore, it is no wonder that both the first and second Beit Hamikdash were destroyed on that day (not to be outdone by the beginning of WWII which took place on that day and brought about unspeakable destruction to world Jewry and the world at large).

So what is the energy of Yom Kippur? It is the power of teshuva and the power of forgiveness. Yom Kippur is the time when the idea of teshuva takes center stage. According to gematria the word hasan adds to 364 it means that 364 days a year the satan has power but on Yom Kippur he doesn't. Historically it is the time that Moshe rabbeinu came down with the second set of lohot (tablets) marking Hashems ultimate forgiveness of the Jewish people for the golden calf. Therefore we see that there is a special energy on the day of Yom Kippur which begs to be utilized.

While on Rosh Hashana we don't make any viduy (confession of sins) on Yom Kippur the entire day is about confession and repentance. However, there is often a misunderstanding that Yom Kippur is a day for physical suffering. Many people believe that through the physical suffering will come about repentance. This is not the idea of Yom Kippur at all. Tisha baav is the time when we afflict ourselves and suffer in a sense for the destruction of the beit hamikdash. There is a well known saying "on Tisha baav who could eat? On Yom Kippur who needs to?" If utilized the right way Yom Kippur should be a day when the physical will not matter.

It says in the Torah that on the tenth day of the month you shall afflict your souls. It says souls and not body. The idea of Yom Kippur is that we separate our physical self from our soul so that we can do real teshuva which is done with the soul. In fact all five of the major prohibitions of Yom Kippur (not eating, not drinking, not wear leather shoes, not have marital relations and not anointing the body) all serve to forget about the body and instead concentrate on the soul. A person who on Yom Kippur keeps thinking about how hungry he/she is has completely missed the point. Yom Kippur is the time when we pay no attention to the body and to be concerned with physical needs at this time will be tragic on a day as important as Yom Kippur.

The kabbalists say that each of the five prohibitions detaches the body from each of the five parts of the soul. According to kabbalah there are five parts of the soul namely nefesh, ruach, neshama, chaya and yechida, with each one being higher than the previous one. Therefore, the 5 prohibitions on Yom Kippur each release a different part of the soul from the body. The nefesh is removed by not wearing leather shoes, the ruach is removed by not washing the body, the neshama is removed by refraining from marital relations, the chaya is removed by not anointing the body, and the yechida is removed by not eating

and drinking. Each of the parts of the soul have special characteristics which correspond to these prohibitions but these ideas are beyond many of us and therefore we can not really go into them. While these ideas are again too deep to go into lets try to understand how the lowest and highest parts of the soul are removed through not wearing leather shoes and refraining from eating and drinking.

Not Wearing Leather Shoes

Let's look at the idea of not wearing leather shoes first. The nefesh is the lowest part of the soul and that is the one that actually resides in a person's body. Refraining from wearing leather shoes detaches this part of the soul from the body so that it can rise from the physical and be only spiritual for that day. The question often asked is how does not wearing leather shoes do this? Again these are deep kabbalistic ideas which are hard for us to understand but let's touch the surface.

The Baal Shem Tov and many other Gedolim (greats) used to say that everything in the physical world teaches us something about the spiritual world. In fact there are kabalistic works which deal with this at length and ask what we can learn from all kinds of physical things like why do we have two eyes but one nose? This is a deep question being that it says in the Torah that man and woman were made in the image of Hashem. Hashem is not physical therefore it follows from there that our physical appearance has to teach us something about the realm of Hashem and the spiritual world.

With that background let's look more deeply at what the feet and shoes of a person teach about the realities of the spiritual world. According to the deeper sources the lowest part of the soul (neshama) is engulfed in the body just like the lowest part of the body (feet) are engulfed in the shoes. Also the shoes help the foot walk on rough grounds the same way that the body helps the soul go through a physical world even though the soul is not physical. This has many applications in the Torah. This is why Moshe and other prophets were asked to remove their shoes in the presence of Hashem; to transcend the physical and embrace the higher spiritual things. This is also why when the kohanim go up to bless the congregation they remove their shoes. One other application is the idea of chalitza. This needs further explanation.

According to the Torah if a brother passes away without children then his brother has to marry his widow through a process called yibum. There are deep reasons for this, one being that the child born through this will be the soul of the brother that passed away. Incidentally we see in the Torah regarding Tamar that after the first son of Yehuda who married her dies, the second son marries her. Then the second son dies and Yehuda withholds his third son. The story follows that Tamar tricks Yehuda and has his child (this was based on the fact that she knew she had to have a son through Yehuda's family, she knew that the Moshiach would come from that dynasty and indeed we have a deep tradition that the Moshiach will come from the dynasty of David whose ancestor was from the child that was created between Yehuda and Tamar). The commentaries ask a question "which soul of the two brothers would come back?" As we said before when someone from the family marries the widow who didn't have children then the soul of the deceased comes back. The commentaries then answer that it says that she had twins so both souls came back. After the giving of the Torah only the brother of the deceased was allowed to do yibum and close to a thousand years ago yibum was banned by the Rabbis who said we are not at that level to be able to do it nowadays.

That background leads us into the ceremony of chalitzah which is performed when the brother of the deceased refuses to marry the widow. The widow then has to take off his shoe and spit on it and read a verse. What is the meaning of this? Let's apply what we learned before about shoes. Shoes represent the body while the foot represents the lowest part of the soul. By removing the shoe she is saying you didn't allow the soul (represented by the foot) of your brother to come down in a new body (represented by the shoe). The spitting represents the male seeds which the brother refused to provide to make the new body (shoe).

The idea of not wearing leather shoes specifically stems from the fact that according to kabbalah, the lowest part of the soul which is the nefesh is also present in animals and that's why we don't wear leather which is made from animal's skins. In fact the Halacha (Jewish law) of touching leather shoes is the same as touching a dead corpse one must wash his/her afterwards. This is because they are both void of the soul. This is just a light explanation there is much more hidden and mystical meanings behind this which is too deep for us to understand.

Refraining from Eating and Drinking

Now let's look at the idea of refraining from eating and drinking. Perhaps an analogy will help us comprehend this rather complex idea. In the physical world when two things are not attached naturally together then something is needed to hold them together. For example if we want to attach a piece of wood to a piece of metal then we need glue or screws to make this connection. In the same sense, the body and the soul are two things which are not naturally connected due to the fact that they are mere opposites; the body is physical while the soul is not. Therefore Hashem made it so that food would be the glue or the screw that keeps these two entities together. This is why when a person doesn't eat he/she feels faint; the soul is slowly leaving. If a person doesn't eat for a long time then this becomes permanent and becomes what we define as death. A person who is alive and a person who is dead have only one difference in the physical sense and that is that a person who is alive has functioning organs while a person who is dead doesn't. The soul is what keeps the organs working. The body after death is the same the organs are the same the only difference is that there is no soul to keep it working. In fact many doctors have attested to the fact that although when a person dies it is still the same body, there is a certain glow which goes away and is rather noticeable. In short food is what keeps the soul and the body together.

The Nefesh Hachaim (by Chaim Volozhn the student of the Vilna Gaon) explains that this is the reason for the karbanot (sacrifices). The sacrifices serve as the food of the world. Just like when a person doesn't eat his/her soul begins to leave and he/she feels faint, when the world does not have the beit hamikdash where the sacrifices (food) can be brought the world becomes faint. The world becomes faint because there is no karbanot to keep the world's soul (Hashem) in it. This is one of the reasons why the world today is really detached from spirituality and anything beyond the physical as opposed to the past.

How do we fix this? We need a slight background to be able to answer this. According to the deeper sources the areas of the body that have more than one function do so for a reason. They show that those functions must be related in some way. The mouth has three functions namely eating, speaking and kissing. These three functions are related in the sense that they all produce a certain connection. Let's look at this more

deeply. Eating as we said before connects the body to the soul. Speaking connects a person to another person and connects the ideas of the brain to the outside world. Lastly kissing connects two persons as well on a more intimate level. This is why universally humans from all cultures kiss with the mouth. It is the area of connection and therefore it is the area that is so sensitive to stimulation from another person.

Now let's look at the previous question: how do we fix this faint world without a *beit hamikdash* to being sacrifices in? The answer is with another work of the mouth namely *tefila* (prayer). As we said the mouth has within it the power of connection and the same way that food can keep Hashem's presence in the world, the other function of the mouth, *tefila*, can do so as well. In fact the three functions of the mouth are also the three functions of the *Beit Hamikdash* (temple). Sacrifices in the temple relate to eating with the mouth, prayer in the *beit hamikdash* relate to talking with the mouth and finally the two cherubim (image of two golden childlike angels embraced) which were inside the *kodesh kadashim* represents kissing with the mouth.

Therefore not eating and drinking removes the highest part of the soul, namely the *yechida* from the body so that for one day a year we can go beyond the physical and into a part of the spiritual which is not possible through our physical senses and bodies.

The Shofar

There is an analogy about shofar which I think really encompasses the deeper meanings behind the mystical idea of blowing the shofar. The analogy is as follows:

There was a certain prince who decided to go for a walk outside of the palace. He was warned by the king to always go in a straight path so that he can always find his way back by looking back and seeing where the castle was. However after a while, he saw something interesting along the way and decided to follow the forked path. After a while he decided to go back however the prince looked back and didn't see the castle. He had made turns on his path and he hadn't gone straight and therefore could no longer see the castle by looking straight back. After looking for hours, he gave up and took up residence with a group of thieves who lived there.

Years went by and he became more and more accustomed to the lives of the thieves to the point where he had forgotten all the things which were taught to him in the palace. One day as he was sitting in the house he heard trumpets followed by a message in a foreign language. He immediately recognized the trumpets as the sounds of the trumpets of his father's palace but he couldn't understand the message. He had forgotten his native language but somehow he knew that the message was sent from his father who had come looking for him. He didn't know what to do. What could he say to get the attention of the king to come to him, after-all he had forgotten his native language. Finally he decided to follow the sound of the trumpet and cry as he did when he was a child. Cries that he believed his father would recognize from the time when he was a baby. The trumpets blew and aided the child to go towards it and the child cried aiding the king who had recognized the Child's voice about his whereabouts. Closer and closer they came to each other until finally they met at the curve of the road where he had strayed from the straight path his father had warned him to stay on.

In this analogy we are the prince and Hashem is the king. He continuously has told us to take the straight path. The name *Yisrael* can be read as *Yashar el* the straight ones of Hashem (*el* is a name of Hashem and *yashar* means straight). In fact the other

name for the Jewish people in the Torah is yeshurun from the root of yashar which means straight. The word bereishit which is known to contain the entire Torah can be read as beyashar alef taf straight from alef to taf (the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet).

As the prince did we don't follow Hashem's advice and at times during the year we go astray by not taking the straight path and lose our way. However on Yom Kippur Hashem just like the king goes out into the field and blows the shofar from the curve of the road where we went astray. In fact this is one of the reasons why a curved shofar is used because that's where the sound is produced; in the curve. Our job on Yom Kippur is to wake up with Hashem's shofar. We no longer hear him calling because we have gone so far off the way that we have in a sense forgotten his language. However we must recognize the sound of his shofar and blow our own shofar with our prayers and cries as the prince did so that we can get closer and closer to Hashem and embrace him.

Teshuva

It is important to keep in mind that for us to return to Hashem like the prince did to his father it is necessary that we make teshuva. The word teshuva is often mistranslated as repentance. However the real meaning of the word is return. We are returning to the time before we did wrong, we are returning to the curve where we went astray, and we are returning to the time when we were one with Hashem in his palace. That's the idea of real teshuva. It is not just to go back to the time before the sin but it's to go back to the time when we were one with Hashem before we were born.

What's the practical application of this? Just as the prince had to leave behind his life with the thieves, even though he had become used to it and found it as comfortable, we have to leave the lifestyles we have built after we went astray. Leave it behind and embrace our father, Hashem.

The tefilot of Yom Kippur all revolve around the idea of teshuva. The Rambam says that the mitzvah of teshuvah has three steps: confession, regret and saying that one would not do it again. It is important to note that all three steps have to be said out loud. There are many reasons for this and one is that just like the sin was done with a physical act so too the teshuvah for it has to be done with a physical act in this case being speaking. While it is true that the tefilot contain the first two steps namely confession and regret, the third part is not present in the tefilot. The reason is that all the prayers are said in the plural form and so we can speak for everyone when we say we have done these sins and that we regret them however we can't speak for someone else and say and we wouldn't do it again. Therefore it is very important on Yom Kippur to add our own prayer saying that we will do everything in our power not to do these acts again.

Another idea about the Yom Kippur tefilot that is worth mentioning is that the viduy (confession) part of the tefila contains many gruesome sins which many of us wouldn't even think about doing. One may ask why do I have to say it if I didn't do it? One answer is that it is said in the plural and so saying it is not in vain being that there is some person who did it and as Jews we are all responsible for one another. Another answer is given by the Rambam. There was once a person who presented him this question and the Rambam showed him how he had committed every single one on his own level. For example many of us think that we never do idol worship but if we look deeply we will see that at our own level we do. There are many wrong things that we

wouldn't do if there was another person around out of mere embarrassment or respect for that other person. However as religious people who believe Hashem is always watching we often do not have the regard we have for other people for Hashem this in a sense is idol worship. Others include embarrassing others which is compared to killing, waking up someone which is compared to stealing which by the way can not be paid back and so on and so forth. Therefore it is appropriate for every person to say the entire viduy (confession) prayer.

Doing kaparot according to the Arizal is very important therefore one should definitely try to do it as well. Also for the last meal before the fast one should not eat eggs or fish.

Finally the Rambam says that when a person does teshuva out of fear then the sin gets erased but when does teshuva out of love then the sin becomes a mitzvah! The reason for this is a person who does teshuva out of fear hasn't really changed him/herself and the proof is that if the punishment were taken away he/she would go back to doing those things. However a person who does teshuva out of love for Hashem has changed him/herself and being that it was the sin itself which caused this change within him/herself then the sin itself transforms into a merit. Therefore may we all have an inspiring, uplifting and teshuva (out of love) -filled Yom Kippur, and may we all be zoche to witness the coming of Moshiach through our teshuva, tefila and tzedaka bimhera beyameinu amen.

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