

כפור

*The Day of Atonement*

**Y**om Kippur is the most awe-inspiring day of the year. Fortunate are the Jewish people, that all of them are awakened during these awesome days, especially on the day of Yom Kippur itself. G-d looks down upon men from Heaven, and He places the fear of the great and awesome judgment and arousal to repent in their hearts. Would that this be the condition of their hearts all of their days! However, our Sages (Berachot 33b) already said, “Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for the fear of Heaven.” It is only by virtue of G-d’s compassion on His nation Israel, His intimate nation, that He shines His countenance upon them during these awesome days, with the light of fear and trepidation. A man must draw inspiration from the radiance of the influence of these days for the entire year. According to the degree that a man is awakened during these awe-inspiring days, fortifies himself to fear G-d, makes protective devices and barriers to prevent himself from sinning, and commits himself to maintain the ways of repentance even after Yom Kippur, so will he find Divine support throughout the year to fear G-d. The fear of G-d is pure and everlasting. This individual will ascend on the spiritual ladder until he is purified from his defilement and achieves his redemption.

Behold, we came into existence with sin, and no man regrets his evil ways. Only during these awe-inspiring days are people somewhat careful in a few of the ways of Judaism: They rise early

to say Selichot (the penitentiary prayers) and increase slightly their study of Tehillim and other works. On Rosh HaShanah they recite the order of Tashlich, and say, “We have already thrown our sins into the water.” On Erev Yom Kippur they perform Kapparot (with chickens or money). On Yom Kippur they spend the entire day in the synagogue and cry out in a loud voice all of the prayers. Their cry ascends until the ground is cracked by their voice. Yet, if there is an “opportunity” on that day to speak to their friend in the synagogue, to make a dispute, or to commit any other wrongdoings and violations, they do not abandon their “custom”. They are not able to restrain themselves and overcome their evil inclination.

Many of the common people are not careful in regard to the prohibition of washing on Yom Kippur – they wash their faces and hands up to their wrist like any other day. They are not careful in the prohibition of wearing shoes – they do not remove their shoes until they arrive at their seat in the synagogue. The result is that on the day of forgiveness they are adding willful wrongdoing to their sins. They think that they have already discharged their obligation and are purified from all of their sins and iniquities. Would that G-d declare they are innocent and consider the little that they do as a lot! G-d, Who is good, should forgive them “...because the whole nation has sinned unintentionally.” (BaMidbar, 15:26) The common people do not know the upright path. They merely follow the custom of their fathers – the habitual performance of mitzvot. What should the son do who does not know on which path the light shines? The night shines like day unto him; darkness is the same as light. He thinks, “What other obligation do I have? I will do it.” Upon whom shall we rely in

circumstances like these? On our Father in Heaven! He, in His compassion will shine His countenance upon us and bless all of us with the radiance of His Presence. In the radiance of the face of the King, there is life!

Granted, “For the Jews there was light...” (Megillat Esther 8:16) – this refers to Torah, and this is its reward – one who studies it diligently discovers the way of life and upholds the pathways of the righteous. However, it is explicit in the words of our Sages that this “way” does not remove a person from sin. This idea is already stated clearly in the words of Yishayahu HaNavi (Perek 58) in the haftarah that we read on Yom Kippur, “Behold, you fast for the sake of argument and dispute, and to strike with the fist of a wicked man. Do not fast today to make heard on High your voice. Is this the kind of fast that I choose – the day a man merely afflicts his soul? Will a man simply bow his head like a reed; will you call this a fast and day of good favor before G-d? Is not this the fast that I choose: When one breaks the shackles of the wicked... When you offer your bread to the hungry ...?” It is explicit in the words of the prophet (Yishayahu, 55:7), “Let the wicked man abandon his way and the sinful man his thoughts. Let him return to G-d, and He will have compassion upon him.” And it is written (Mishlei, 28:14), “... one who confesses and forsakes [his sins] will be shown compassion.” There are many more sacred verses like these in the words of the prophets which teach the way of repentance.

In a similar vein, the special nature of Yom Kippur is to eliminate transgressions and to purge sins. This is explicit in all of the holy works: the Talmud, midrashim, the holy Zohar, and the books of mussar (moral perfection). It cleanses those individuals who repent, and does not cleanse those who do not repent. Behold,

there are four categories of atonement: repentance, Yom Kippur, suffering, and death – depending upon the nature of the sin. There are several tikunim (means of rectification), orders of fasting, and self-castigation for a wayward soul that were articulated by the holy mouth of the Arizal and other holy men for each kind of sin and transgression. Yet, if Yom Kippur alone is enough to expiate one's sin, would there be any need for all of these other things? Does not Yom Kippur occur every year? We must conclude that Yom Kippur is efficacious and effects some degree of purity even for people who do not repent – the special quality of the day itself causes this to happen. However, it achieves only a lesser degree of purity, and when a person resumes his depravity after Yom Kippur, everything returns to its prior state.

Rebbe Yehonatan, in his classic work, *Ya'arot D'vash*, wrote that when the klipah, (lit. external shell, i.e., evil inclination), sees that a man does not even have the slightest trace of holiness because he sinned grievously and increased impurity, and it does not find even the slightest “moistness” of holiness to suck on – what does it do? The evil inclination places in his heart the inspiration to slightly increase his performance of mitzvot and good deeds during these awesome days temporarily – on condition that they not maintain for long. This is actually very bad for him – because when he returns to his evil ways, all the “wealth” of mitzvot and good deeds that he amassed falls into the portion of the “grabber” – the *sitra achra* (side of evil) swallows his fortune. Referring to this, the verse (Tehillim, 50:16) says, “And G-d said to the wicked man, ‘What business do you have telling my statues...?’” As a result of this, the person goes from bad to worse, and the soul of the sinner dies due to his sin – because the way of man is right in

his eyes, and even when he grows old, he will not forsake it. Even if during the year the wicked man hears admonitions and words of mussar, they do not awaken his heart, for he has sealed his eyes from seeing and his heart from feeling. The sins are dividing barriers that blind the eyes of discerning people, so that they walk all their days in darkness, and they do not see light, until they descend with grief into the grave. This is a cause of obstruction – the prevention of the coming of mashiach (messiah) for all these long days and many difficult years. Woe unto us from the Day of Judgment! Woe unto us from the day of reproof!

But who is the man who desires life and wants to have pity on the honor of his Maker, and on his own person, spirit, and soul? Our Maker has already instructed us in the way one should choose – the way of life! As it is written (Devarim, 30:19), “... and you should choose life...” This is the way of an upright man, a G-d-fearing person – he should not wait until the days of awe and the day of Yom Kippur to awaken himself. Rather, every day should be in his eyes like Yom Kippur. He should repent all of his days. Fortunate is the man who is always afraid!

However, when the season of the awe-inspiring days approaches, the man who did not pay heed during the days of his vanity, who walked in darkness without any light, who consumed his days in nothingness and his years in futility, as is the common practice in the world – if he merits that his eyes are opened and illuminated by the light of these days – this should be the regimen that will succeed in reviving him: he must increase his study of or attendance at the lessons of mussar and the fear of G-d, for they penetrate into the inner recesses of the heart. He must see with his eyes, hear with his ears, and understand with his heart that his

abandoning of G-d is bad and bitter. He should be grieved with tremendous bitterness, and totally regret everything that he did that was not good, for sinning against his soul, and for causing through his sins much evil and pain to Heaven. He should decrease his involvement in business during these days, even his involvement in analytical study, and he should study the works of moral improvement in order to keep, to do, and to fulfill. He should desire with a whole heart and a fervent soul to rectify his wrongdoings and to go in the way of the righteous. He must seek in the holy books, and from the people who wrote them, the upright path that a man should choose. Each day he should recite the text of the long confession. If he does not understand Hebrew, he should go to a Torah scholar who will translate the entire text with all of the details of the sins upon which people stumble. He must firmly accept upon himself to abandon his evil ways, and to assume precautions to prevent himself from ever returning to any wrongdoing that he had violated until now. The study of Torah is the most essential – the penitent person must resolve that he will devote himself to Torah study or that he will to a sage who will teach him every moment he is free. “Great is Torah study for it brings one to action.” (Kidushin 40b) A person should write down everything that he accepts upon himself, whether in regard to doing good deeds or to refraining from evil ones. He should penalize himself with a monetary fine or some kind of self-affliction each time that he fails to fulfill his commitment. This document should be a remembrance between his eyes, and he should read it weekly – without fail – for it is a tremendous protective device (as I wrote above in the entry, Gader).

Each day from Rosh Chodesh Elul and onward, a man should continuously increase his walking in the ways of penitence. Every day he should pour forth supplication, seek forgiveness, and increase charity according to his ability. He should be "... like a poor man who faints and pours forth his supplication before G-d." (see Tehillim, 102:1), that He should help him for the sake of the honor of His name. If a person does not understand Hebrew, he must go to a sage who will prepare for him a formulation of confession and supplication in his native language, or he will copy from the awesome prayers that appear in the holy books that have been translated from Hebrew. When the eve of Yom Kippur arrives, he must add more fear to his fright, for the day of G-d approaches – the great and awesome Day of Judgment. Just before dawn, when it is darkest, he should keep the custom of Israel and perform kapparot for all of his household members – from youngest to oldest. There is a secret in this practice to "sweeten" the bitter judgments, similar to what the commentators (Ramban, Parshat VaYikra) said is the basic reason for the sacrifices – that a person's heart should be humbled when he contemplates that everything which is done to the animal was befitting to be done to him as atonement for his sin. Also at that moment a man should intend that he is executing the four types of capital punishment on the chicken: holding on to its neck is like death by strangulation; slaughtering it is like death by the sword; throwing it on the ground after slaughtering is like death by stoning; and singing it in fire is like death by fire. His heart should be humbled by thinking that this was befitting to be done to him. He should pour forth his supplication, that it should be considered as if it was done to him. I have the custom of reciting this prayer:

*For the sake of the unity of the Holy One Blessed Be He and His Divine Presence, behold, I am prepared and ready to fulfill the custom of Israel to slaughter kapparot on behalf of myself and on behalf of the members of my household. May it be Your will, our G-d and G-d of our fathers, that You have compassion upon us, and consider it like we have done everything that is incumbent upon us, and we intended, as if, all of the proper intentions. May they sweeten the bitter judgments and draw the kindnesses upon us. May it be considered that everything which is done to these birds has been done to us, and may You consider it like we were stoned, burnt, killed by the sword, and strangulated in the Great Court in Jerusalem by the four letters of the name Adnut, and may whatever damage we have caused to the twelve letters of the three precious names havaya, ehyeh, and adnut, be repaired. May all of the names be reunited in total unification, all of the worlds be repaired completely; may everything be restored to its first strength, and may the one who is cast away not be left behind. May these birds be the redemption of our lives – soul for soul, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, and leg for leg. May this be my substitute, my exchange, and my atonement, (three times). This chicken will go to its death, but I shall enter into a good, long, and peaceful life in Your service and in Your fear. Remember us for life, the King who desires life. Write us in the book of life for Your sake, O' living G-d. Please, merciful and compassionate G-d, Who is slow to anger, slow Your anger until we return unto You with complete penitence. Do not take us from this world until we complete the perfection of our person, spirit, and soul. May You quickly redeem us. May You rebuild the House of our holiness and glory, and may we*

*offer before You sacrifices and perform the service of the “goat that was sent away” (see VaYikra, Perek 16) to atone for us. May You, in Your great mercy desire us, and favor us. May the pleasantness, etc. May You rejoice the soul of Your servant, because unto You, O’ G-d, I lift up my soul. I trust in You, my G-d – may I not be embarrassed. May You act for the sake of Your great mercies, etc.*

Afterwards, one should give the chickens or their monetary value to poor students of Torah or other decent men. The custom is also to perform the order of the annulment of vows and curses. Many G-d-fearing individuals are accustomed to receive four lashes. Whoever does more of these kinds of good customs and other pious practices during these days is praiseworthy – because this is what we are asking of G-d: that He should treat us with the attributes of kindness and compassion – within the letter of the law. Who is the man that can survive if G-d sustains the world only with justice? This is like the words of David HaMelech, (Tehillim, 143:2), “Do not come unto Your servant with strict judgment, for no living being will be found righteous before You.” Therefore, one also needs to increase charity and kindness during these days, in order that G-d will treat us with charity and kindness. A person should not allow himself to be upset by anyone or anything, so that G-d will overlook his wrongdoing.

Even though it is good for a man to afflict his soul to the extent that he can bear, for this is the call of the hour – nevertheless, on the eve of Yom Kippur there is a mitzvah to increase one’s eating and drinking as much as he is able with fear, love, and great happiness – when a living person reflects on what is happening in Heaven through our eating on this day. This eating stands at the

heights of the world and builds realms in Heaven. Everything that is done – whether through the eating on this day or the afflictions and prayers of Yom Kippur – forms a ladder whose base is on the ground and whose top reaches heaven. These are time-honored ideas. Fortunate is a mortal man who achieves this. Fortunate is he, for he provides contentment to his Maker – the uplifted and exalted King. The Jewish people should rejoice in their Maker with an unparalleled happiness on this day – even according to the simple understanding of these matters – for G-d has sanctified us with His mitzvoth and commanded us in the mitzvah of repentance. Before the injury was initiated, the healing already blossomed. G-d said to us, “When you rebel against Me, take with you words and return unto Me – for I am always merciful, I am appeased with compassion, and I am reconciled with supplications. You will afflict your souls, especially on the tenth day of the seventh month – for on this day I will grant you atonement.” The Torah commanded us to fast only one day of the year. Even so, because of G-d’s great love for His nation, He commanded us to increase our eating on the day before – the ninth day of Tishri, like a father who cajoles his son and says, “Eat a lot, my beloved son, in order that you will have the strength to fast.” This is the same thing that G-d did to His chosen people, His first-born son. It is considered a mitzvah for us whether through eating, fasting, praying, or repenting, and He pays us a handsome reward. Is there anything as sweet to the palate as this? Fortunate are we, and how goodly is our portion! It is impossible not to rejoice. Nevertheless, if in regard to other days of the year it says (Tehillim, 2:11), “... and they rejoice with trembling.”, how much more so on this day!

Therefore, a person should not drink a lot of wine on the eve of Yom Kippur. The wise man's eyes are "in his head" – he should increase his sumptuous eating in the morning, so there is adequate time for his food to digest. He should cleanse his body early in the day. After his eating, he should lie down and rest a little bit in order that he has enough strength to be vigilant on the night of Yom Kippur and throughout the awesome day. Afterwards, if he has any unfinished business matters, he should take care of them. Then he should cleanse his body inside and outside – use the bathroom, and immerse in a mikveh (ritual bath) for the purpose of repentance. He must not be remiss in this regard. This person should commence his prayers and thoughts of penitence early, pray the Mincha service while the day is still young, dress in white, and sit down for the pre-Yom Kippur meal (Seudah HaMafseket) early in the day – so that he may conduct himself with deliberation and allow his food to digest before he goes to the synagogue. The food he eats at the pre-Yom Kippur meal should be small in quantity and large in quality – for example, a good soup and a small amount of chicken. Then he should clothe himself with trembling and proceed to the synagogue with fear, trepidation, shivering, and sweat to accept the awesome and awe-inspiring sanctity of the day.

A man should say all of his prayers and supplications on Yom Kippur with a genuine broken heart and proper intention. Submissiveness is a fundamental principle in the purification of a man and the acceptance of his prayers. Therefore, a person should not raucously raise his voice. All of his prayers should be said in a soft, petitioning, and crying voice. Behold, a person who understands Hebrew – who pays attention to and pronounces his

words so that his ears can hear them – and delves into both the depth and breadth of each word, while opposite his eyes he beholds the greatness and exaltedness of the grand and lofty King, and his own immense humility, lowliness, and sinfulness, will strongly humble his heart and feel very bitter. He should plead as an impoverished man with crying and supplication; perhaps there is hope for him. It is appropriate for G-d-fearing individuals to record in the margin of their holy books different kinds of inspirations by each prayer and petition to serve as a remembrance between their eyes to awaken their hearts. They should write down each relevant thing which is found in the holy books, and anything which they think of on their own. They should also write down the accurate versions of the texts of the prayers, because there are many mistakes that have crept into the prayer books. One should continue to make new additions each year to bring himself merit, and he should copy inspirational citations from any new works that come into his possession. Likewise, he should record explanations of words and phrases which are not easy to understand at first glance, in order that he recite them fluently. One should go to a Torah scholar who will teach him the meaning of those passages that he did not understand, due to their Hebrew formulation, in order that at least the concept of all the prayers will be available to him.

In any case, it is the obligation of every man to display the fear of G-d on his face each day. He should imagine that he is actually standing in judgment before a grand, lofty, awesome, and awe-inspiring king. He should continuously think pure and holy thoughts in such a fashion that his eye cry bitter tears, and his heart is happy, anxious, and secure. This person must not turn his

heart to wantonness for even a moment, and his mouth must never cease from study the entire day and the majority of the night. He must balance his affairs with justice – i.e., he should not stay up all night learning, lest the worship of the day be too difficult, and his gain be consumed by his losses. Rather, when a man sees that the throes of slumber fall upon him on the night of Yom Kippur, he should not push himself to stay up longer; instead he should immediately go to sleep and rest. He should get up before dawn if he is able, increase his studies, and even more so, his prayers and supplications for spiritual matters. His entire objective, desire, appeal, and request should be that G-d assist him for the sake of the honor of His name, to transform his will into the will of Heaven, and to provide contentment before the throne of glory. There is no better portion than this! This is the whole of man. Upon whom else shall we rely except for our Father in Heaven? If He did not help us, we would not be able to do any good thing, for we are very impoverished and lacking all good. If our Sages (Rosh HaShanah 18a) said that during the Ten Days of Penitence even the prayer of an individual is readily accepted, as it is written (Tehillim, 69:14), “And I, may my prayer to You, be at a time of favor...”, and it is written (Yishayahu, 49:8), “... at a time of favor I answered you...”, and it is written (ibid, 55:6), “Seek G-d when He is found...”, how much more so on Yom Kippur, for it is a time of good favor more than any other day of the year, and the gates of favor are open.

Therefore, a person must not turn to idleness for even a moment on Yom Kippur. It is written in the holy books that when a man engages in Torah study and supplications on Yom Kippur for a brief hour, it is more important than an entire day of study and

prayer during the rest of the year. Consequently, it is appropriate to have pity on this day – for it is fleeting. A man who is negligent about doing everything that is within his ability loses much good. How vigilant a person has to be during these times not to stumble over the slightest wrongdoing, especially on Yom Kippur itself. The punishment for someone who does not hold the fear of G-d before his eyes – who sins during these days – is much more severe. Perhaps the balance will be tipped in favor of the side of his sins, and he will be found guilty in his judgment.

Even more so, a person needs to be cautious not to violate any of the five afflictions on Yom Kippur, since they are the mitzvoth of the day. Just as a person is careful about eating and drinking, so too must he be watchful in regard to washing – he should not wash his face at all, and he should only wash his hands to the end of the digits. He must not wear a shoe of leather at all; even though there are some halachic decisors who do permit wearing shoes in the streets of non-Jews, it is not the rule of pious people, especially in our time. We have heard regarding the prohibition of marital relations that one should not touch his wife at all, just like when she is a nidah (menstruating). A person should think that we recite, “Baruch Shem Kavod Malchusoh L’Olam Va’ed out loud because we approximate the angels on this day. If we are not vigilant and quick to stand on guard to the extent of our ability, sanctity and purity, and with fear, trepidation, shivering, and sweat, what comparison is there between us and the angels? Will not the ministering angels mock us?

Therefore, every man should clothe himself with trembling and wrap himself with shivering. Everything good which is within his ability to do, he should do – whether in the realm of thought,

speech, or action. He must firmly commit with a whole heart and a passionate soul that this evil man will abandon his evil ways and will go on the way of good men. He will walk in the pathways of the righteous in order to raise the Divine Presence from the dust, to awaken his love, and to provide contentment for his Maker. This needs to be the goal of all our prayers, mitzvot, study, and penitence. These are a few of the ways of uprightness which are appropriate for these awe-inspiring days and on Yom Kippur. Then a person will merit to be written in the Book of Good Life, together with the righteous and pure men. (Your eyes should see what I wrote in the entries: Rosh HaShanah, Shaliach Tzibur, Slichot, and Teshuvah. A wise man will hear and increase instruction.

