

Gratitude from the Torah

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Shabbat Yom Kippur Why is Yom Kippur the Happiest Day of the Year?

Yom Kippur – the Gift of Forgiveness to Every Jew

We have entered the solemn period of the Ten Days of Repentance when we prepare ourselves for Yom Kippur. Now is the time for deep inner self-reflection and work to face our fears.

At this auspicious time, we dig deeply into our psyche to bring up our shadow sides to the surface. Digging into our shadow side and uprooting our spiritual weeds is no less daunting than the arduous toil of digging deeply into the hard soil of the land, turning it, softening it, adding compost, and getting it ready for the winter crop. Yet when the new crop sprouts forth from the freshly turned soiled, we become filled with awareness and gratitude that all the hard work was worthwhile. The work of Yom Kippur likewise bears fruit. It sprouts forth our higher purified selves. Yes, it is hard to dig up parts of ourselves that we may have repressed in the recesses of the crevices of our souls. However, only by facing these exiled slivers of selves can we dissolve the spiritual husks that block us from cleaving to our Divine source. Therefore, on Yom Kippur – the happiest day of the year – our hearts must be filled with simcha (happiness). This is because Yom Kippur extends a special gift of forgiveness and atonement to every Jew. I'm grateful for this favorable day when we become renewed and purified. There is no greater happiness than being able to feel good about ourselves. Therefore, Yom Kippur is the happiest day of the year as it states, Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said, there were never days as good for Israel as the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur. ...Yom Kippur because it entails pardon and forgiveness, the day that the second tablets were given (*Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 30b*). Our Neshama (soul) feels this happiness and becomes filled with joy and light on Yom Kippur. Rav Shlomo Carlebach offers us a parable: Imagine, I owe the bank ten million dollars. All of a sudden, I get a letter from the bank that they not only pardon me this debt, but they moreover offer me a loan for another ten million dollars. Would I then continue to walk around tearfully sighing because I didn't pay off my debt from the prior year? In truth, Yom Kippur is much more than this. On Yom Kippur when the Kohen Gadol enters the holy of holies, each Jew has a spark in the depths of our heart which enters the holy of holies with him. Entering the holy of holies is beyond space (*Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 21a*), just as Yom Kippur is beyond time. On Yom Kippur we become aware that we can connect ourselves with the highest place in heaven. This place is so high that there we cannot make any more mistakes, as no evil abides there (Based on Rav Shlomo, *Lev Hashamayim for Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Sukkot*, p.164 and 170).

On Yom Kippur, we celebrate not only the forgiveness granted to us but especially the closeness to Hashem this holiest day of the year offers us.

If we Rectify the Blemish in the Upper Worlds, Hashem will Rectify our Souls

People somehow mistakenly think that Yom Kippur is a sad day because it's a fast day. It is indeed a very serious day but that doesn't preclude it from being a happy day as well. Being seriously happy is part of the Torah way as it states,

סַפֵּר תְּהִלִּים פֶּרֶק בַּ פְּסוּק יֵא עֲבָדוּ אֶת ה'שֵׁם בְּיִרְאָה וּגְלוּ בְרַעְדָּה:

Serve Hashem with fear and rejoice with trembling! (*Tehillim 2:11*).

On Yom Kippur we tremble to purify ourselves through Teshuva (repentance), while we are happy and grateful for the special heavenly help, we receive to become purified. Yom Kippur is a cosmic wedding

between us and Hashem who brings us close while whispering in our ear, “Return to Me and I will return to you” (*Malachi* 3:7). These prophetic words teach us that our main endeavor is not only to rectify our soul, not even the root of our souls, for this too is a bit self-serving. Rather, the main Yom Kippur service is to return to Hashem from a broken heart due to the exile of the Shechinah (Divine Feminine Presence). The main reason we repent our negative deeds is that they caused the exile of the Shechinah to whom we desire to return – that is the essence of, “Return to Me...” – to make a dwelling place for the Shechinah. Hashem promises that when you return to Hashem “...He will return to you.” Perhaps we might feel that this goal is too uplifted, and it would be better to focus on rectifying the three lower levels of our soul (Nefesh, Ruach, Neshama). Therefore, Hashem assures us that if our teshuva is for the sake of returning the Shechinah, Hashem “will return to us” by taking care of rectifying our souls. Thus, there are two parts of rectification through teshuva: 1. Rectifying the blemish on the three parts of our soul. 2. Rectifying the blemish in the upper worlds that cause separation between The Holy One and His Shechinah (between Ze’er Anpin and Malchut). If we care about rectifying the blemish in the upper worlds, Hashem will rectify our souls.

How does the Vidui (Confession) Prayer Reflect the Two Stages of Atonement?

In the Yom Kippur Torah Reading we learn about the essence of this auspicious day:

סַפֵּר וּיקְרָא פֶּרֶק טז פְּסוּקֵי לַ כִּי בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכַּפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל חַטֹּאתֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי הָשֵׁם תְּטָהְרוּ:
 “For on this day, He shall affect atonement for you to purify you from all your sins. Before Hashem, you shall be pure” (*Vayikra* 16:30).

This verse paraphrases the two stages of rectification through teshuva: In the first stage, Hashem promises to cause us atonement by purifying our souls. The second stage describes our mitzvah to purify ourselves. This parallels the two parts of the Vidui (confession) that we recite repeatedly on Yom Kippur. In the first part, we confess our sins in the order of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, “We have sinned (*ashamnu*), we have acted treacherously (*bagadnu*), we have robbed (*gazalnu*), we have spoken slander (*dibarnu*).” This part of the Vidui refers to the blemishes we have caused on our souls, that Hashem will fix on Yom Kippur. In the second part of the Vidui the emphasis is on the sins we have committed **before Hashem**, thus causing the separation of the Shechinah: “For the sin which we have committed before You under duress or willingly. And for the sin which we have committed before You by hard-heartedness. For the sin which we have committed before You inadvertently...” This part of the confession applies to our responsibility to pray for the blemish above, and the return of the Shechinah below. Based on these two levels of purification alluded to in the two parts of the Vidui, we can understand the well-known dispute about whether the atonement on Yom Kippur only applies when we do teshuva, or that the essence of the day causes atonement even if we don’t repent (*Mesechet Yoma* Chapter 8). The view that Yom Kippur atones whether a person repents or not applies to the rectification that Hashem enacts for us: “He shall effect atonement for you to purify you from all your sins.” Yet, “Before Hashem, you shall be pure” applies to rectifying the separation between us and Hashem – the exile of the Shechinah and the upper worlds. That is our responsibility. For this part, we will only receive atonement through repentance. Since this is our main work on Yom Kippur the main tefilah (prayer) centers around “before Hashem you must become pure” and “Return to Me.” (Based on Rav Moshe Refael Luria, *Ori v’Yishi* pp. 274-275). Isn’t this the truest ‘at-one-ment’?

**Gratitude Focus for the Week of Parashat Ha'azinu –
Tips on Recognizing and Thanking Hashem While Facing Your Fears**

In my experience, fear is the main block that blocks us from cleaving fully to Hashem and causes separation of the Shechinah. Therefore, as we pray and confess during Yom Kippur, we must not forget to take the time to meditate on our repressed fears that often manifest in our subconsciousness and cause various pains that block the Shechinah from residing within us. There is nothing Hashem wants more than for us to open ourselves to welcome His Presence in the deepest recesses of our soul as it states, “Make for Me a sanctuary and I will reside within you” (*Shemot* 25:8). As much as Hashem wants the rebuilding of the Temple as His Divine home, He yearns, even more, to dwell within each of us. “The Kotzker Rebbe was once asked: “Where does G-d dwell?” to which he replied, “Wherever you let Him in.”

- **Allow Yourself to Tune Into the Feeling of Your Fear** – When you experience fear, you feel it as a physical thing. Often fear feels like a constriction in the chest throat or head. Allow the movement of that fear to play upon the physical form in any way it wishes. Do not try to remove it, turn it aside, swallow it, or run from it. Be in a totally receptive state and allow it to move around inside you. When you start allowing you will observe that fear comes in waves. It is not an ongoing power, because it is not divinely motivated. Be grateful that this is so, for now, you know there is a way to overcome your fear. First of all, allow the fear to play upon you.
- **Center Yourself** – When you feel the thoughts between the waves of your fear, stay centered in the awareness that fear is present. Please do not say “I am afraid.” The statement should be “Fear is present.” There is an important difference between those two statements. The “I” of you is not afraid, and fear does not define its nature. At the same time, center yourself as deeply as you can in the areas of the heart. Center yourself with all the determined will you can muster and stay there. Simply sit there!
- **Observe the Motion of Fear** – Interesting things will happen if you are determined to observe the motion of fear. The more time you spend centered in this area, the greater your power will be when you are in real difficulty. Make the most use of the days when you are free of fear, for there will come times when you will need to be centered.
- **Focus on Your Heart Center** – As you sit quietly within this awareness, and observe the movements present, you will see that the heart center is where all your fear fades. As you dwell there, you will find more and more of your days and nights filled with a dynamic quality that frees you from your own illusory creation. Humanity calls this dynamic quality Love. It is the power within the center of your heart that allows you to know your connectedness with Hashem and with everything and everyone. There is nothing outside of you; all is within, so there is nothing to fear.
- **Tap into the Unconditional Love You Seek** – that lies quietly waiting within the center of your being, and when you have tapped into it, fear will vanish. Love fears nothing because all fears are illusions that block Hashem’s loving light.
- **Spend as Many Moments of Your Days as You Can, Quietly Resting** – in the center of your being, not allowing your fears to pull you away, and you will experience the dissipation of your fears (Based on *I Come As a Brother: A Remembrance of Illusions* by Bartholomew, Mary-Margaret Moore, Joy Franklin, and Jill Kramer).