

Yom Kippur

During the course of the entire year when we say the Shema, the second verse, ברוך שם כבוד , מלכותו לעולם ועד , (Baruch shem ..) *Blessed is the Honorable Name of Hashem for ever and ever*, is said silently. On Yom Kippur, however, in the evening Shema, and in the morning Shema, the custom is to say that verse out loud. What is behind this custom?

Our sages explain, that when Moshe Rabbeinu went up to heaven to receive the Torah he heard the angels praising God with this special praise. He liked it so much that he memorized it and taught it to the Jewish people when he came down. However, he instructed them not to say it out loud. Rabbi Ami said, you know why? It's like someone who stole a necklace from the royal palace. When he gave the necklace to his wife he told her, "don't you dare wear this necklace in public, you may wear it only in our home." Similarly, because Moses stole this beautiful praise from the angels, it would not be appropriate for us to flaunt it, by saying it out loud. Therefore, we must say it silently all year. However, on Yom Kippur, when we are like angels ourselves, we are allowed to say it out loud just like the angles in heaven do.

Each and every Yom Kippur when I recite the Shema the first time, and say this verse out loud, it hits me like a ton of bricks. On Yom Kippur, I am supposed to be like an angel! That is why I am saying this verse out loud! It sets the tone for the entire day for me and allows me to focus clearly on what the expectation is from this day, to elevate myself to the level of an angel.

How are we to accomplish that? The prescription is in the Torah.

We read in the second chapter of Genesis, how Hashem created Adam.

ספר בראשית פרק ב

(ז) וַיִּצָר יְדוּד אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה:

7. And Hashem God formed the man of dust from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living being:

A human being is a miraculous synthesis between a body that comes from the earth and a soul which comes from Hashem. The body from the earth we understand, but what is the nature of the soul?

Our sages describe the soul as a spark of Hashem. They derive this from the description in the Torah of how Adam received his soul. It says "and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life." Why is it important for the Torah to tell us how Hashem placed the soul into man? It is to teach us that the soul comes from Hashem himself. For, when one breathes out, the air that is exhaled, is the air that was within him. Similarly, the soul that Hashem blew into Adam came from within Himself.

These two opposing forces are always at odds with each other. The body with its selfish desires and urges is always demanding gratification. The soul, on the other hand, is the rational voice of reason, and its job is to control the body. This is the human condition; the struggle never abates. When the body wins, our spirituality declines and our earthiness expands. On the other hand, when the soul wins, our earthiness declines and our spirituality grows. This constant battle that

goes on between these two opposing forces is the purpose of our existence in this world. Our goal is to overcome our earthiness and become a spiritual person. The way we accomplish this is through performing the mitzvot, the spiritual power pills that Hashem has given us in His Torah. With every mitzvah that we perform we become more spiritual and closer to our goal. With every sin that we perform we become less spiritual and farther from our goal.

The more spiritual we are the closer we get to Hashem.

How do we accomplish this on Yom Kippur? The prescription is in the Torah. (Leviticus Ch. 16 V. 29-31)

ויקרא פרק טז
כט) וְהִיְתָה לָכֶם לְחֻקַּת עוֹלָם בְּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּעֶשְׂרֵי הַחֹדֶשׁ תַּעֲנֻוּ אֶת נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם וְכֹל מְלֹאכֶה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ הָאֲזָרָח וְהַגֵּר הַגֵּר
בְּתוֹכְכֶם
ל) כִּי בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכַּפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטַהַר אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל חַטָּאתֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי יְיָ קִוּוּ תִטְהָרוּ
לא) שְׁבֹת שְׁבֹתוֹן הִיא לָכֶם וְעֲנִיתֶם אֶת נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם חֻקַּת עוֹלָם

29. *This shall remain for you an eternal decree - In the seventh month, on the tenth of the month, **you shall afflict yourselves** and you shall not do any work, neither the native nor the proselyte who dwells among you:*

30. *For on this day He shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you; from all your sins before Hashem shall you be cleansed:*

31. *It is a Sabbath of complete rest for you, **and you shall afflict yourselves**; an eternal decree:*

These three verses are speaking about Yom Kippur. The tenth day of the seventh month, is the 10th of Tishrei, the date of Yom Kippur. It is a day of Shabbat, a day on which we rest from any מלאכה - which means *constructive work*. In two of the verses, the Torah instructs us to afflict ourselves on this day.

What is the meaning of this affliction? Are we to scratch ourselves? Put stones in our shoes? Should everybody pick something they find afflicting and do it to themselves on Yom Kippur?

Here is a perfect example of how we see that the Torah was given to Moshe with the oral explanation of the commandments.

When Hashem gave the Torah to Moshe on Sinai, and He dictated this verse, Hashem told him, "let me explain what I mean here. You will notice, Moshe, how in scripture, there are only five things that are referred to as "ענוי - *affliction*." Those five things, and Hashem listed them, are the only afflictions I am referring to in this passage."

In the Talmud, the Sages scoured the entire written Torah, and zeroed in on the five things Hashem referred to as an affliction, and revealed them to us. As an aside; the word ענוי - *affliction* or different forms of it, appears 80 times in scripture, and includes many different types of afflictions. However, the Sages of the Talmud through using the 13 principles for deciphering the Torah, eliminated most of them and distilled it down to just the five that Hashem told Moshe.

These are the five things that are forbidden on Yom Kippur.

- a. No eating or drinking
- b. No smearing oils to soothe the body
- c. No marital relations
- d. No washing for pleasure such as a shower or bath
- e. No wearing leather shoes

A quick look at this list reveals the obvious purpose for these prohibitions. It seems clear that they are designed to minimize the pleasure of the body on Yom Kippur. This will in turn, allow us to concentrate on our spiritual endeavors and reach higher spiritual heights on this Holy day.

All seem to fit except the last one, wearing leather shoes. How does that apply? Sure, a good pair of leather shoes feel good on our feet, but guess what? So does a good pair of sneakers! Why are we allowed to wear comfortable sneakers and not leather shoes?

Our sages teach us that the soul of a person has various levels of holiness. During our existence in this world, we get only the tail end, or the foot, so to speak, of our very holy soul. Because the part of the soul that we get is considered the foot of the soul, our body, which serves as it's vessel is like it's shoe.

And just as shoes allows our soft feet to walk on all types of hurtful terrains, and in all types of substances that would get our feet dirty, the body allows our soul to "walk" in a world that would otherwise be hostile to it.

We see this concept from Moses when he approached the burning bush, to receive his first prophesy. Hashem told him, "Remove your shoes from your feet." Our sages explain that Hashem was telling Moses, in order for you to be capable of receiving a prophesy, you must remove your physical body from your soul. This way, your soul will be free and unfettered with the materialistic body, and you will be suitable for prophesy.

So, now we understand the shoes, by why is only leather prohibited?

To answer this question, we must go all the way back to the first set of clothing ever created.

ספר בראשית פרק ג
(כא) וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה אֱלֹקִים לְאָדָם וּלְאִשְׁתּוֹ כְּתָנוּת עוֹר וַיַּלְבְּשֵׁם:

21. And Hashem God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them:

The very first set of real clothing that Adam and Chava wore were made for them by Hashem. These were regal respectable garments made of skin, or fur, that completely covered their bodies, instead of the fig leaf aprons they had made for themselves. The purpose was to cover up the body and minimize its prominence and its desires. This would allow the dignity and holiness of the soul to shine forth and provide man with a clear understanding of who he really is. The human body is a beautiful thing, and man can easily make the mistake of thinking that he is his body, and nothing more. This is why modest dress is so important in Judaism. It puts the materialistic body out of sight and out of mind. The Torah teaches us that we are a soul, and our bodies are merely the shoes that allow our soul to "walk" in this earthy world.

The world we live in today does not subscribe to this perspective on humanity. On the contrary, our world is obsessed with looks.

This is the reason why only shoes made from the skin of an animal are forbidden on Yom Kippur. The leather shoe which represents the body and was the very first material used to cover the body, is reminiscent of the earthiness of the body and its need to be covered. This is what we are trying to minimize on Yom Kippur.

There is another very important message being conveyed here.

The Talmud tells us that Rabbi Alexandri, would add the following prayer to his daily prayers.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף יז/א
ורבי אלכסנדר בתר דמצלי אמר הכי רבון העולמים גלוי וידוע לפניך שרצוננו לעשות רצונך ומי מעכב
שאור שבעיסה ושעבוד מלכיות יהי רצון מלפניך שתצילנו מידם ונשוב לעשות חוקי רצונך בלבב שלם

Master of the universe, it is revealed and known before You, that our true desire is to do Your will, but what is standing in our way? The leaven in the dough (the evil inclination within us) and the society we live in (the evil influence from outside of us). Please save us from them so we may do Your will with all our hearts.

King David said in Psalm Ch. 101 V. 14

(1) ספר תהילים פרק קג
(ד) כִּי הוּא יָדַע יִצְרָנוּ זָכוֹר כִּי עֲפָר אֲנִינּוּ:

14. For He knows our evil inclinations, remember we are of dust.

Hashem knows what we are made of and what the temptations of being human are. We have it from inside and outside. It is not because we are malicious or mal intentioned against Hashem. It is because of our earthy component, the body, and the society we live in, that we do the things that we do. Hashem, please see me as I stand before you today, on Yom Kippur without my body pulling on me and influencing me. This is the real me. I want to do Your will.

It is not easy to abstain from these five pleasures for over twenty - four hours. The fact that we are prepared to put ourselves out and deprive ourselves of pleasures that we would very much enjoy, shows that we are serious about achieving forgiveness. This is all Hashem needs, to shower us with forgiveness.

As we read in verse 30 above.

30. For on this day He shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you; from all your sins before Hashem shall you be cleansed:

There is something inherent in the day of Yom Kippur that makes it a day of awesome forgiveness. This is the day that Hashem Himself will cleanse us of our sins.

The Mishna in Tractate Taanit refers to Yom Kippur as “Hashem’s wedding day.”

תלמוד בבלי מסכת תענית דף כו עמוד ב
וכן הוא אומר צאינה וראינה בנות ציון במלך שלמה בעטרה בעטרה לו אמו ביום חתנתו וביום שמחת לבו,

What wedding are we celebrating here, and who is the bride?

Rashi explains: This is referring to the second tablets with the Ten Commandments that Hashem gave the Jewish people on Yom Kippur. Hashem was the groom, the Jewish people were the bride, and the tablets were the wedding ring. This was the day that Hashem in His infinite love and mercy renewed our relationship with him, and forgave us for our previous sins.

This is what has set this day in the Jewish calendar as a day when Hashem is in the mode of infinite love and mercy, and is most forgiving of our sins. When we stand "afflicted" to fulfill the laws of Hashem as given to us in the Torah, and ask for forgiveness, we are guaranteed to leave Yom Kippur like a new born baby, completely free of sin.

There is a question our Sages ask.

How come in the *Shema* at the start of Yom Kippur, when our bellies are full of the big meal we just ate, and we are fresh after a shower and are feeling pretty good, we say the verse "*Baruch shem ...*" out loud, and in the evening service following Yom Kippur, when we feel so holy from fasting and praying all day, do we say the verse silently?

The answer our Sages give is, that at the start of Yom Kippur, our minds are focused on the holy day coming up, and our task on that day. That is holy stuff, and therefore, since we are headed into holiness, we are considered like angels already. Whereas, after the shofar has been blown, and Yom Kippur is over, our minds are beginning to think about the things we need to do when we get home, and about the days ahead. So, since we are headed towards mundane matters, we are no longer like angels, and must say it silently.

The *Shema* after Yom Kippur is my wake - up call going forward after Yom Kippur. After this amazing holy day, a day I spent fasting and praying, I am now re-entering the material world. I am no longer like an angel. What can I take with me from this holy day to last until next Yom Kippur?

May we all be inscribed and sealed in the Book of Life for a healthy, happy new year!