



Partners In Torah

San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura

Take home Dvar Torah

תשפ"ה Yom Kippur

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Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.

Thank you for joining us!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

This coming Shabbat is Yom Kippur! Instead of enjoying the traditional Shabbat dinner with our families with all their requisite delicacies and treats, we will instead be in shul, praying and fasting for forgiveness for our sins. Indeed, Yom Kippur is the only fast day important enough to override the Shabbat requirement of - ענג – *pleasuring* the Shabbat. Yom Kippur is very serious business, and, if observed properly, can be a game changer.

What is our goal on Yom Kippur? What is it that we seek to achieve? Through fasting and the day's special prayers, we try to remove all our sins and return to the pure state we were in when we entered this world as a newborn baby. If we are successful in achieving that goal, we will merit to be sealed in the "Book of the Righteous" and we will have secured for ourselves the best possible judgment for the coming year.

Yom Kippur is not an "all or nothing" proposition; and it is possible that one only erase some of his sins. Yet the goal of erasing all of one's sins is very attainable, and that is what we should strive to achieve. This is because the day's design and structure is geared towards helping us accomplish our mission.

The first step, of course, is to prepare ourselves for the task.

The Torah teaches us (Leviticus 23:27):

(כז) אַךְ בְּעֶשְׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי הַזֶּה יוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים הוּא מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ יְהִיָּה לָכֶם
וְעֲנִיתֶם אֶת נַפְשֵׁיכֶם וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם אֶשָׁה לַיהוָה

27) *But, on the tenth day of this seventh month, is the Day of Atonement; there shall be a holy convocation for you, and **you shall afflict yourselves**; you shall offer a fire offering to Hashem.*

On Yom Kippur we are commanded to afflict ourselves, but how do we fulfill this commandment? Will any affliction do? Should one place

stones in his shoes? Or perhaps everyone should pick something that he finds afflicting and do it to himself on Yom Kippur?

Although the commandment as stated is vague, the exact definition of “affliction” is explained in the Oral Torah that was given in tandem with the written Torah.

In the Written Torah one is considered “*afflicted*” when he is lacking five specific pleasures. From that we derive that the affliction mentioned here refers only to those five pleasures, and that by abstaining from those specific pleasures, one is afflicting himself.

- 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 the list reveals the obvious purpose for these prohibitions: to minimize the physical pleasure of the body on Yom Kippur. Abstaining from these five pleasures on Yom Kippur helps us to internalize our true situation in this world. And what is that?

We read in Genesis (2:7) how Hashem created Adam:

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

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

Our Sages describe the soul as a “piece” of Hashem- חלק אלקה, ממעל so to speak. They derive it from the Torah’s description of how Adam received his soul. The verse states: “*and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life.*” Why does the Torah tell us how Hashem placed the soul into man? Why not just say, “And Hashem gave man a soul ...”? It is to

teach us that the soul comes from Hashem Himself, a part of Him, so to speak. For, when one exhales, the air comes from within him. מאן דנפח מדיליה נפח. Similarly, the soul that Hashem “blew” into Adam came from “within” Him.

The human being comprises a miraculous combination of an earthly body and a holy soul, “a piece of Hashem.” The soul is the real person, who comes to this earth with a specific mission in service to Hashem – to learn Torah and perform mitzvot. The body is like his “spacesuit.” Just as a human being needs a spacesuit to simulate earth’s conditions on the moon, so, too, the spiritual soul cannot function in a physical world and needs a physical body to give it “hands and legs” to fulfill its mission in a physical world. When one has completed his mission, body and soul return to their respective sources.

These two components diametrically oppose each other.

Because of the body’s earthly origin, by nature the human being is lazy and wants to do as little as possible. The body also wishes to indulge in the earthly pleasures that make it feel good. Because we experience the immediate pleasure of the moment, we easily gravitate toward these indulgences.

The soul, on the other hand, seeks to fulfill *its* mission - to obey Hashem’s commandments, but this always comes with a challenge. Whenever a person attempts to perform a mitzvah, the evil force in the world - the יצר הרע - rises up against him to prevent him from doing it.

The body and the soul are always at odds with each other. With its selfish desires and urges, the body always demands gratification, continually seeking the world’s forbidden pleasures. The soul, on the other hand, provides the rational voice of reason telling the body, “You can’t have that, it is prohibited to you.” Such is the human condition; the

struggle never ends. When the body wins, our spirituality declines, and our earthiness expands. When the soul wins, our earthiness declines, and our spirituality grows. This constant tug of war underlies the purpose of our existence in this world, the goal of which is to overcome our earthiness to become spiritual. We accomplish this through learning the Holy Torah and performing the mitzvot, the spiritual “power pills” that Hashem has given us. With every word of Torah that we learn, and with every mitzvah that we perform, we become more spiritual and closer to our goal. The more spiritual that we are the closer we are to Hashem. On the other hand, with every transgression, we become less spiritual and farther from our goal.

In keeping Yom Kippur’s five prohibitions, we are minimizing the body’s needs, internalizing the idea that we are souls and that our bodies are our merely here to help our soul fulfill its mission. This, in turn, allows us to concentrate on our spiritual endeavors and reach higher spiritual levels on this Holy day.

All seem to fit except the final one, wearing leather shoes. How does that constitute an “affliction?” Sure, a good pair of leather shoes feel good on our feet, but so does a good pair of non-leather sneakers! Why are we allowed to wear comfortable sneakers and not leather shoes?

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

And just as shoes allow our soft feet to walk on all types of terrains and on all types of substances that would hurt or dirty our feet, the body

allows our soul to “walk” in a world that would otherwise be hostile to it.

We learn 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, “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 by your materialistic body, and you will be spiritual enough to receive a prophesy.”

We understand the shoe concept, by why is only leather prohibited?

To answer this question, we must return to the first set of clothing ever created (Genesis 3:21):

(כא) וַיַּעַשׂ יְיָ אֱלֹהִים לְאָדָם וּלְחַוָּה בְּתָנִיּוֹת עוֹר וַיַּלְבִּשֵׁם :

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

Hashem made the very first set of real clothing for Adam and Chava. These were regal, respectable garments made of skin, or fur, that completely covered their bodies, replacing the fig leaf aprons that they had made for themselves. Upon eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad, the evil inclination entered their bodies and made them realize they were naked and needed to cover themselves. Now they needed clothing to cover their bodies to minimize its prominence and the desire for it. 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 earthly world.

Today’s world does not subscribe to this perspective on humanity. Most people think that their body is who they are. This is why they are obsessed with making their body look as beautiful and as flashy as possible. Little or no attention is given to the soul, cultivating internal qualities such as fine character and virtue.

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

There is another very important message 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 אלכסנדרי 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 103:14

(יד) כִּי הוּא יָדַע יִצְרָנוּ זָכוֹר כִּי עָפָר אֲנַחְנוּ :

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

Hashem, our Creator, knows what we are made of and the challenges and temptations that we face on a daily, moment to moment, basis. We have it from inside (*the evil inclination within us*) and outside (*the society we live in*). It is not that we are malicious or mal intentioned against Hashem. It is because of our earthly 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 24 hours. 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.

So now we are in the proper state for Yom Kippur; we are ready for the next and most crucial step, teshuva – returning to Hashem through repenting for our sins. When the Men of the Great Assembly composed the liturgy for Yom Kippur, they incorporated into it the necessary ingredient to achieve teshuva, namely - וְדוּיָ – *viduy* - the confessional. It is said numerous times during the prayers, both in the silent devotion and in the chazan’s repetition.

The confessional lists, in alphabetical order, the most common sins that one might have transgressed. As one says each of the sins on the list, he is supposed to reflect on his actions and determine if he is guilty of that sin. If he is, he should sincerely regret having done it and accept upon himself never to do it again. With this, he has successfully done teshuva on that sin, and Hashem will forgive him for it. As one proceeds through the list, thinking about his actions over the past year and repenting for them one by one, he will achieve forgiveness for all of his sins.

This is the formula for emerging from Yom Kippur pure of sin with a completely clean slate for the future. First, we afflict ourselves and deny our bodies the pleasures it craves. With that we express to Hashem and to ourselves that we understand that we “a soul” not a body, and that we are here on this earth to fulfill the mission of our souls. On this very solid foundation, we ask Hashem to forgive our sins by performing teshuva on each of them.

Add to this the awesomeness of the Yom Kippur day and Hashem’s willingness to forgive us, and it is guaranteed that all our sins will be forgiven. As we conclude Yom Kippur, we can go home elated knowing that our sins have been forgiven, and that we can now start the new year with a fresh, clean slate.

This year, as we approach Yom Kippur, our people face an existential challenge. Our brothers and sisters in Israel are fighting against an enemy that wants to kill every Jewish man, woman, and child in Israel. Tragically, we constantly hear of heroic soldiers falling in battle. Tonight is October 8, the day after the anniversary of one of the most horrific days in our history, and the day that began the war in which we are still engaged.

Yom Kippur seals the judgment that was tentatively made on Rosh Hashana, but has the power to repeal a negative judgment. If we act appropriately, we can have a major impact on next year’s fate for our people.

When the Holy Temples stood, the Kohen Gadol – the High Priest-- and his performance of the Yom Kippur service was the focus of everyone’s attention. He alone, through a finely detailed and exact protocol, was the Jewish nation’s ambassador to procure forgiveness for their sins. Instead of going to shuls to pray, the people would go to the Holy Temple to be present during the special service.

The highpoint of the Yom Kippur service was when the Kohen Gadol would enter the Holy of Holies. Only on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, could the holiest Jew of the nation, the Kohen Gadol, enter the holiest place on earth, the Holy of Holies.

What would the Kohen Gadol do in the Holy of Holies on this auspicious occasion? It would clearly have to be something extremely meaningful and important.

In the Holy of Holies, the Kohen Gadol would bring an offering of incense – קטרת – *ketoret*, as follows.

They would bring the Kohen Gadol a bowl of incense and a golden spoon. He would then dip his hand into the bowl of incense, take out a handful, and put it into the spoon. He would next take a pan of burning coals in his right hand, the spoon of incense in his left, and enter the Holy of Holies. Upon entering, he would place the pan of coals on the Holy Ark between the poles, pour the incense from the spoon back into his hand, and then pour it onto the burning coals. When the Holy of Holies filled with the smoke of the burning incense, he exited, walking backwards. At a later point in the service, he would reenter the Holy of Holies to retrieve the pan.

What is so important about burning incense in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur?

Our Sages explain that *ketoret* (incense) symbolizes the Jewish people and represents us at our best. The reason for this is that the *ketoret* comprised eleven specific spices that, when blended, produced the most amazing fragrance possible. (The Talmud reports that no bride in Jerusalem ever needed to wear perfume because of the fragrance of the incense.)

The *ketoret's* uniqueness was that one of the blend's eleven spices, חלבנה - *chelbena*, had a foul odor when burned alone. But when mixed with the other ten, it contributed to the overall sweet fragrance. Hence, the eleven spices were really ten plus one.

This is a metaphor for the Jewish people. The Jewish congregation comprises many variegated people. There may be some Jews who “don't smell so great,” but when they join forces with the congregation (the other ten spices – like a minyan), they add to the congregation and make it greater. Their foul odor is incorporated into, and thereby *enhances*, the congregation.

This concept, that Jews of all types and stripes join to form one congregation, is so precious to Hashem, that that forms the highpoint of the Yom Kippur service, and it enters the Holy of Holies, the focal point of Hashem's presence on this earth.

There is a greater significance to this and here lies the secret for a good judgment for the Jewish nation. Because we are one congregation, and Hashem must decree a good judgment for the holy and righteous in the congregation, all the others are brought along for the ride. Since they are part of the same unit, they must receive the same judgment.

This is what we can do for our brothers and sisters in Israel. Understanding that we are one congregation, one unit, “The Jewish Nation,” we should have their welfare in our prayers, showing that we are one.

The Code of Jewish Law (606:1) states:

(א) עבירות שבין אדם לחבירו אין יום הכיפורים מכפר עד שיפייסנו ; אפילו לא הקניטו אלא בדברים, צריך לפייסו

1) Yom Kippur doesn't atone for sins between man and his fellow man until he has appeased him. Even if his transgression was only with words, he must still appease him.

Being at peace with our fellow Jew is an essential component of Yom Kippur. It is vital to our people that we be one. To that end, we must seek out those whom we have wronged and appease them by asking forgiveness for our act to repair the relationship. Therefore, on the eve of Yom Kippur, it is customary to ask for forgiveness from anyone we have wronged.

On the flip side, our Sages teach us that when others have wronged *us* and come to ask *us* forgiveness, we should not be stubborn to forgive. We should immediately and sincerely forgive. With this, we are modeling the behavior that we want Hashem to have with us when we ask Him for forgiveness. Because Hashem treats us the way we treat others, Hashem will be quick to forgive us also.

Here we have the whole picture for complete forgiveness. We prepare ourselves for holiness by abiding by the five prohibitions, we beseech Hashem for forgiveness for our sins to him, and we rectify any wrongdoings to our fellow Jew, melding us into one unit guaranteed of a good judgment.

We pray that Hashem grant us a year of peace and prosperity, and may He bring the Mashiach who will put an end to all our troubles, speedily in our days.