
YOM KIPPUR

Actualizing Our Mission in Life

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is the culmination of the Ten Days of Repentance begun on Rosh HaShanah. Whereas Rosh HaShanah affords a global perspective of our role in the world – we reaffirm God as the Creator and Master of the universe and are judged to the extent that we are fulfilling our respective responsibilities – Yom Kippur is the day wholly dedicated to intense personal introspection, when we each take a serious look at ourselves and commit to a practical plan to aspire to fulfill our awesome potential. How?

The Mishnah (Ta'anit 26b) states that there is no greater day for the Jewish people than Yom Kippur, when we are granted the extraordinary opportunity to do *teshuvah* (lit. return [to God] – repentance) and atone for our transgressions. Yom Kippur is uniquely powerful in that whoever is earnest in his *teshuvah* can transform himself through hard work, strive to perfect his character, and can reconcile his relationships with others and with God. Yom Kippur offers a once in a year opportunity to crystallize one's mission in life and implement a realistic strategy to achieve great strides in actualizing it.

The two Morasha shiurim on Teshuvah are prerequisites to this class.

This class will address the following questions:

- Why is Yom Kippur so conducive for focusing on one's mission in life?
- How does Yom Kippur enable a person to erase a past life laden with mistakes?
- Why are the five afflictions, in combination with refraining from creative work, a prerequisite for great spiritual strides on Yom Kippur?
- How do the Yom Kippur prayers and readings provide an inspirational framework for introspection and personal growth?
- How can I implement a realistic strategy to reach my potential in life?

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SECTION I. ACTUALIZING OUR MISSION IN LIFE

On Rosh HaShanah we see the big picture. We affirm that God created and guides the universe. We coronate God as King of the world amidst resounding shofar blasts. We identify with both the great deeds of the *avot* (forefathers) and the dedication of the nascent Jewish nation that followed God into the desert to receive the Torah at Mount Sinai. As we are judged for another year of life, health, and prosperity, we reaffirm our commitment to be part of the great chain of the Jewish people. We understand that we are accountable for our mistakes and begin the process of the Ten Days of Teshuvah.

On Yom Kippur, the big picture fades to the background and the individual comes into the limelight. We focus an entire day on the fact that God created each of us with a unique mission to fulfill and the resources with which to do it.

1. **Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. I, p. 168 – The profound importance of each individual and his purpose in life.**

Every person needs to know that he has importance. Not an imagined importance that he “considers himself as special”... rather a deeply profound importance that is even shocking.

The Talmud states, “Each and every person must declare, ‘The world was created for me’ (Sanhedrin 37a). Rashi explains that this means I am considered as important as the entire world ...

“Like the entire world” – This is the one-time life experience of a particular person – there was never a person like him and nor will there ever be a person like him throughout history. I, with my special character strengths, the child of my parents, born at a specific time period, and in a certain environment – certainly there is a unique challenge that is placed upon me. I have a special share in the Torah, and the entire world is waiting for me to actualize that which is incumbent upon me. For my role cannot be exchanged with anyone else in the world!

כל אדם חייב לדעת, שיש לו חשיבות. לא חשיבות מדומה שהוא “מחשיב עצמו בעצמו”... אלא חשיבות בעלת משמעות עמוקה ואף מועזת.

“כל אחד ואחד חייב לומר: בשבילי נברא העולם”- רש”י: “כלומר: חשוב אני כעולם מלא, לא אטרד את עצמי מן העולם בעבירה אחת.” (סנהדרין לז, א)

“כעולם מלא” – זוהי חיות חד-פעמיותו של האדם, שלא היה עוד כמותו ולא יהיה כמותו עד סוף כל הדורות. אני עם המיזוג המיוחד של כוחותי, בן לאותם אבות, נולד בתוך אותה תקופה ובאותה סביבה- בודאי עבודה מיוחדת מוטלת עלי, חלק מיוחד לי בתורה, וכל הבריאה מחכה לי שאתקן את המוטל עלי, כי את עבודתי לא אוכל להחליף עם שום אדם אחר בעולם!

2. **Rabbi Yissocher Frand, In Print, ArtScroll, p. 30 – Everyone is born with a unique combination of strengths and at a specific time in history so as to fulfill his unique role in the Divine plan.**

Every Amidah of Yom Kippur ends with ... “My God, before I was formed I was unworthy, and now that I have been formed it is as if I had not been formed.”

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook interpreted this sentence as follows:

“Until I was born, it was not the time for me; my specific mission in life was for this period and no other. And now that I have come into this historic epoch, it is as if I was never born, for I have squandered the abilities that were given to me in order to fulfill this mission.”

Not only is each one of us brought into this world with a unique combination of strengths, but each of us is brought into the world at a particular time when those powers are needed for the fulfillment of some part of the Divine plan.

Thus teshuvah requires both introspection concerning ourselves and intense reflection concerning the situation of the Jewish people in the period in which we live.

On Yom Kippur we need to ask self-defining questions. Who am I? Where am I going? Where could I go? What am I made of? What potential do I have? What unused talents are there within me? What has been misused? What character faults have to be corrected? What haven't I accomplished that which I am capable of? It's the day we are fully alive. It's the day we're fully in touch with our struggle to perfect ourselves. (Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits, Jerusalem Kollel.)

If utilized properly, Yom Kippur offers the opportunity for unsurpassed personal growth. In order to move forward successfully, we first need to repair our past in order to build a solid foundation for the future.

SECTION II. GROUNDWORK FOR AN UNPARALLELED FUTURE – REPAIRING THE PAST

Ever been on a road trip? Ever got lost? Couldn't read the map or didn't have one? Ah, isn't the GPS a lifesaver! The GPS helps keep us on track, and helps us get back on track when we've fallen off course.

I recently had the opportunity to travel with my wife from Cleveland to New York to attend a friend's wedding. Although we originally planned on flying, after learning that the wedding hall was almost two hours away from the airport, coupled with my propensity for getting lost in New York City, we decided to rent a car and drive instead.

The clerk at the counter asked if I was interested in renting a GPS. Not being very technologically advanced, I was only vaguely familiar with GPS, or Global Positioning System, but I knew it could show directions to any destination.

Since we would be leaving on an eight-hour trip the morning of the wedding, and my sense of direction is not very keen, I decided it was a worthwhile investment. I pushed the little green button on the device and punched in the wedding hall's address. Everything was programmed into the little device mounted on the windshield.

As we pulled out of the driveway, the device began talking. "Make first right to South Green Road ... Turn left on Oak Road ... Turn right on Cedar Road ... Turn right on 271 South ... continue for 9 miles..."

I was impressed. It seemed to take all the anxiety out of long-distance driving. "Wouldn't it be great if we had something like a GPS in real-life?" I remarked to my wife. " 'Go to such-and-such school ... continue for four years ... turn right and meet future spouse ... say this-and-this to that person...' It would take so much of the hassle out of the quagmire of decisions and dilemmas we face each day."

My imagination was running away, and I didn't realize I had made a wrong turn. My thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the voice of the GPS: "Off course. Re-routing. Off course. Re-routing."

I looked at the device in awe. I knew that it worked by satellite, but the realization that our every movement was being tracked was a little disconcerting. Guiltily, I quickly pushed the button and followed the instructions until the GPS informed me that I was, once again, "Back on route." I could breathe more easily.

And then it hit me: We do have a GPS in real-life! There is a Great Satellite that tracks all our activities, wherever we go and whatever we do. Clearly God placed us in this world to use our free will, and He leaves all the decision making up to us. But God provided the framework upon which we make our decisions – the Universal GPS, the Torah, as the foundation of our life.

But sometimes we get distracted from the Great Satellite and we find ourselves lost. We may not even realize how far we have strayed off track. Each year Yom Kippur comes to remind us we have strayed off course, and there's a chance for re-routing. We are given clear instructions how to return back on route, through the laws of teshuvah, which literally means return. It is God's great gift to mankind, an opportunity to be rerouted even after we're off course, to be able to return to the proper path. (Adapted from Rabbi Ephraim Nisenbaum, The GPS and Yom Kippur, aish.com.)

PART A. AN AUSPICIOUS TIME FOR TESHUVAH AND FORGIVENESS

In our journey through life to perfect our character, we sometimes err, whether in our relationship with God; or with our families, friends, and colleagues; or even with ourselves. Teshuvah and Yom Kippur were created before the world so that man should have a mechanism to repair his mistakes.

1. Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah #185 – Already at Creation God designated Yom Kippur as a day of atonement, a day whose inherent essence enables us to atone for our sins.

From the beginning of Creation [God] set aside [the day of Yom Kippur] and made it holy for this purpose. Because God designated this day for atonement it became holy and it acquired from God the merit to assist in atonement. This is what our Sages refer to in many places when they say that Yom Kippur atones, meaning that there is a power imbued within the day itself.

ומתחילת בריאת העולם יעדו וקדשו לכך, ואחר שיעדו הקל ברוך הוא אותו היום לכפרה, נתקדש היום וקיבל כח הזכות מאיתו יתעלה עד שהוא מסייע בכפרה. וזהו אמרם ז"ל בהרבה מקומות – ויום הכפורים מכפר, כלומר שיש כח ליום בעצמו לכפרה...

2. Ibid. – Yom Kippur is necessary for the existence of the world.

The basis of this mitzvah is that due to God's kindness toward the Jewish people He established one day a year when they can atone for their sins by the teshuvah they do. If their sins would accumulate each year, their limit would be reached within a few years and the world would have to be destroyed. Therefore, in order for the world to exist, God, in His wisdom, established one day a year to enable those who repent to receive atonement for their sins.

משרשי המצוה שהיה מחסדי הקל על בריותיו לקבוע להן יום אחד בשנה לכפרה על החטאים עם התשובה שישבו, שאילו יתקבצו עוונות הבריות שנה שנה תתמלא סאתם לסוף שנתיים או שלוש או יותר ויתחייב העולם כליו. על כן ראה בחכמתו ברוך הוא, לקיום העולם, לקבוע יום אחד בשנה לכפרת חטאים לשבים...

We know of Biblical figures such as Adam, Cain, Reuven, and Yehudah (Judah) who did teshuvah long before Moshe (Moses) descended with the second tablets from Mount Sinai, when Yom Kippur became an integral part of the Jewish calendar. So what difference does Yom Kippur make? Let us first understand how Yom Kippur became established.

First, God revealed Himself and gave the Ten Commandments to the entire Jewish nation at Mount Sinai. This occurred on the sixth of Sivan (Shavuot). Immediately after that, Moshe ascended Mount Sinai for forty

days to receive the Torah, after which he descended with the first set of Tablets. However, the Jews had built the Golden Calf, an idol, when they presumed that Moshe had died as he had not returned according to schedule. When Moshe returned and saw the Golden Calf, he smashed the Tablets. Moshe again ascended the mountain for another forty days to pray for forgiveness on behalf of the Jewish people. Moshe was then called up a third time to receive the second set of Tablets. He descended forty days later on Yom Kippur with the second set of Tablets when the Jewish people and God became reconciled. Yom Kippur was established as a day of atonement for all generations.

3. **Rashi, Devarim (Deuteronomy) 9:18 – Moshe ascended Mt. Sinai for the third time on Rosh Chodesh Elul and descended on Yom Kippur, when God forgave the Jewish people.**

"I petitioned before God as [I did] the first time, for forty days" – As it says, "And now I will go up to God, maybe I will receive atonement" (Shemot/Exodus 32:30). This [second ascent on Mt. Sinai] began on the eighteenth of Tammuz and [Moshe] remained there for forty days, which ended on the twenty-ninth day of Av. On that day, God forgave the Jewish people and said to Moshe, "Hew for yourself two Tablets ..." [Moshe ascended Mt. Sinai a third time on Rosh Chodesh Elul] and remained an additional forty days which ended with his return on Yom Kippur.

On that day God forgave the Jewish people and said to Moshe, "I have forgiven you as you requested," and therefore Yom Kippur was established as a day of pardon and forgiveness.

ואתנפל לפני ה' כראשונה ארבעים יום - שנאמר ועתה אעלה אל ה' אולי אכפרה באותה עלייה נתעכבתי ארבעים יום נמצאו כלים בכ"ט באב שהוא עלה ב"ח בתמוז בו ביום נתרצה הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל ואמר למשה פסל לך שני לוחות עשה עוד מ' יום נמצאו כלים ביום הכפורים.

בו ביום נתרצה הקב"ה לישראל בשמחה ואמר לו למשה סלחתי כדברך לך הוקבע למחילה ולסליחה.

Once Yom Kippur was established on the tenth of Tishrei, the day the Jewish people and God were reconciled after the Golden Calf, the day became inherently one of atonement.

4. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu, Vol. II, p. 21 – Yom Kippur is a day imbued with an intrinsic spiritual energy of atonement and reconciliation.**

We have already explained that we do not have a token celebration of the festivals, rather we actually return to each festival's origin in time; the very same holiness of time that influences us today is the same as when the festivals were first commemorated. My mentor, Rav Tzvi Hirsh Broide from Kelm said that time does not pass by a person; rather, a person travels *through* time.

For example, the very first Shabbat was a "way station in time" called Shabbat, and every week a person reaches that same way station in time, with exactly the same influence of holiness as the first Shabbat. So it is regarding the festivals ...

כבר ביארנו שלא למזכרת אנו חוגגים את המועדים, אלא חוזרים אנו בהם לתוכנם המקורי – לאותה קדושת הזמן שנשפעת גם עכשיו כבעת ההיא. אמר מו"ר זצ"ל (הרב צבי הירש ברוידא זצ"ל מקלם) כי לא הזמן עובר על האדם, אלא האדם נוסע בתוך הזמן.

למשל: בשבת הראשונה כאילו נקבעה 'תחנה' ששמה שבת, ובכל שבוע ושבוע מגיע האדם לאותה 'תחנה' עצמה – ממש אותה השפעת קדושה עצמה של שבת בראשית. וכן במועדים...

Before the establishment of Yom Kippur, teshuvah removed any transgression from a person. But with Yom Kippur, Jews are given the unprecedented opportunity to wipe away their sins and start anew, with a clean slate. The spiritual levels that were lost are now fully restored, as Ramchal explains:

5. **Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), Derech Hashem (The Way of God), 4:8:5, translation based on Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Feldheim Publishers – Yom Kippur is our chance to return to our former state of connection with God.**

The significance of Yom Kippur is that God set aside one day for the Jewish people when their repentance is readily accepted, and their sins can be easily erased. This rectifies all the [spiritual] damage caused [by these sins] ... and to return those who repent to their former level of holiness and closeness to Him, from which they were distanced as a result of their wrong-doings.

ענין יום הכפורים הוא, שהנה הכין האדון ב"ה לישראל יום אחד, שבו תהיה התשובה קלה להתקבל, והעונות קרובים לימחות דהיינו לתקן כל הקלקולים שנעשו... ולהשיב השבים אל מדריגת הקדושה והקורבה אליו ית', שנתרחקו ממנו על ידי חטאתיהם.

The miracle of Yom Kippur is that we can even make up for years of lost time! (Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits, Jerusalem Kollel.) Through sincere regret, we can transform our misdeeds into merits and achieve even higher levels of spiritual growth. (See the Morasha shiurim on teshuvah). Furthermore, on Yom Kippur, God reaches out to us, so to speak to facilitate our teshuvah.

6. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. I, p.264 – There is a special Divine assistance on Yom Kippur to help us repent.**

Because Yom Kippur itself is a day of Divine mercy, there is a special Heavenly assistance present on this day, which inspires a person to repent.

This applies in a case in which someone is not worthy of assistance, and perhaps according to the letter of the law should not be assisted. Such is the power of the extraordinary opportunity of Yom Kippur – that Heaven assists a person to repent.

יש סיעתא דשמיא מיוחדת של התעוררות תשובה ע"י סגולת יום הכיפורים עצמו, שהוא יום של רחמים...

אפילו שבעצם אין הוא ראוי לכך, ואף שלפי אמת הדין אולי אך לא מגיע לו הסיוע, אולם זהו כח סגולת עיצומו של יוהכ"פ שמן השמים מסייעים בידו לשוב בתשובה.

7. **Rabbi Noach Weinberg, Tipping the Scales, www.aish.com – The day you can go straight to the top, without an appointment.**

Another verse from the prophets tells us to “call unto Him when He is near.” This refers to Yom Kippur. Now is the time to call to the Almighty.

Imagine you wanted to see the mayor. Typically, you’d have to go through several layers of secretaries and aides – and even then he’d only see you if it was vitally important. However, at campaign time, when the mayor is out shaking hands, anyone can see him.

This is Yom Kippur. You can do teshuvah the whole year, but it’s tough – you’ve got to make a big effort to get an appointment. Rambam (Maimonides) says that even though teshuvah is possible throughout the year, during this time it’s accepted immediately. During the High Holidays, God is right there.

Take advantage of the opportunity.

How does Yom Kippur effect atonement?

PART B. ATONEMENT AND THE HAPPINESS OF PURIFICATION

Although one can repent at any time, on Yom Kippur there is a special potency to the day which makes doing teshuvah so much easier – and so much more readily accepted. The end result is purification from transgression.

1. Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:27-28, 32 – The Biblical source for Yom Kippur.

On the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement; it shall be a holy ingathering for you; and you shall afflict your souls, and offer a fire offering to God.

For it is a day of atonement to atone for you before the Lord your God ...

It is a Sabbath of Sabbaths to you and you shall afflict your souls on the ninth of the month in the evening, from evening to evening you shall observe the Sabbath.

אך בעשור לחדש השביעי הזה יום הכפרים הוא מקרא קדש יהיה לכם ועניתם את נפשתיכם והקרבתם אשה לה':

כי יום כפורים הוא לכפר עליכם לפני ה' אלקיכם...

שבת שבתון הוא לכם ועניתם את נפשתיכם בתשעה לחדש בערב מערב עד ערב תשבתו שבתכם.

2. Rabbi Shalom Brezovsky, Nesivos Shalom, Vol. II, p. 167 – The essence of the day brings atonement.

The idea that “the essence of the day brings atonement” is as follows:

The essence of this great and holy day is that God elevates the Jewish person to a perspective higher than the low and petty world in which the wrongdoing was committed; therefore by default all of his sins are atoned for. By clinging to God on this holy day, God brings us closer to Him.

וזה ענין עיצומו של יום מכפר:

עיצומו של יום גדול וקדוש זה הוא, שהקב"ה מרים בו את איש יהודי למעלה מהעולם השפל שבו חטא ופגם, וממילא מתכפרין לו כל העוונות....ע"י שאתם מתדבקים בהקב"ה ביום הקדוש הזה הנכם מתרוממים אליו ית"ש.

3. Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Yoma 85b – We “immerse ourselves” in God and He acts like our mikvah.

Rabbi Akiva said, “Happy are you Israel! Before Whom are you purified and Who purifies you? Your Father in heaven! As it says, ‘And I will cast upon you waters of purity and you will be purified.’ And it says, ‘God is the mikvah of Israel. Just as a mikvah purifies the impure, so the Holy One, Blessed is He, purifies Israel.’”

אמר רבי עקיבא אשריכם ישראל לפני מי אתם מטהרין ומי מטהר אתכם אביכם שבשמים שנאמר “וזרקתי עליכם מים טהורים וטהרתם” ואומר “מקוה ישראל ה” מה מקוה מטהר את הטמאים אף הקב"ה מטהר את ישראל.

Contrary to some people's conception of the day as being sad, the Sages describe Yom Kippur as one of the happiest days of the year!

4. Talmud Bavli, Ta'anit 26b – Yom Kippur is one of the happiest days of the year.

There were no happier days for the Jews than the Fifteenth of Av and Yom Kippur.

לא היו ימים טובים לישראל כחמשה עשר באב וכיום הכפורים.

(The Fifteenth of Av was a joyous day during the Temple Period when young men and women would court to marry).

Although Yom Kippur is a day of pensive self-reflection, it is also a time of great happiness. This is when God gives us the chance to turn back the clock and become purified from our transgressions.

5. Talmud Bavli, Yoma 85b – Happiness comes from purity.

Rabbi Akiva said, "Happy are you Israel! Before Whom are you purified and Who purifies you? Your Father in heaven!

אמר רבי עקיבא אשריכם ישראל לפני מי אתם מטהרין ומי מטהר אתכם אביכם שבשמים ...

The connection between joy and purity is eloquently expressed in one of the seven blessings given to a bride and groom: they should be happy like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, when they were free of any sin.

6. Talmud Bavli, Ketubot 8a – The greatest joy is purity from sin.

Grant perfect joy to these loving companions, as You did for your creations in the Garden of Eden.

שמח תשמח ריעים האהובים, כשמוחך יצירך בגן עדן מקדם.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II:

- ≈ Yom Kippur has been designated for all time as a day of repentance, a day when we can take stock of where we stand, assess what direction we want to go in, and get our lives back on track.
- ≈ Although we can do teshuvah at any time, Yom Kippur has a special power, which makes the teshuvah process much easier. While it is we who must repent and return to God, on Yom Kippur He helps us with the process.
- ≈ From the dawn of time, God designated Yom Kippur as a day of teshuvah and He imbued this day with a special spiritual power which enables us to atone for our sins. The essence of the day itself helps us atone for our sins.
- ≈ Yom Kippur is a time when God is close. We should therefore take advantage of this closeness and return to Him.
- ≈ Although it is a serious day, it is also a happy one because God allows us to turn back the clock and start anew. Without clearing our record once a year, our sins would accumulate and the world would not be sustainable.

SECTION III. PREREQUISITES FOR SPIRITUAL ACCOUNTING – THE FIVE NO'S THAT YIELD A YES

PART A. THE FIVE AFFLICTIONS

One of the best known features of Yom Kippur – sometimes the only thing people know about this day – is that we are forbidden to eat or drink. What is the meaning and purpose of this? In our effort to discern and work on our mission in life, we need to peel away the distractions to enable us to concentrate on the essentials. As we will see below, the ultimate goal of the restrictions on Yom Kippur is to open up all of our spiritual channels.

An anthropologist visiting a synagogue on Yom Kippur might think that since no one is eating or drinking for an entire 24-hour period, the congregants are all suffering terribly. He would probably conclude that the purpose of the fast is solely to induce suffering for the sake of atonement. These observations would completely miss the mark. It is true that on Yom Kippur there is an obligation to refrain from eating, drinking, washing for pleasure, using lotions, wearing leather shoes or engaging in intimacy. A person observing these prohibitions is not necessarily suffering, however. When I was a child I used to be an avid reader. I would become so engrossed in a book that I would not hear my mother calling me for supper and would be unaware of any hunger or thirst. (In Divine retribution, I now call my own children when they are reading and they too are unable to hear me.) As soon as I had finished the book, however, I would be ravenously hungry and thirsty because my mind was no longer focused on reading.

A similar phenomenon occurs for many people on Yom Kippur. They are focused on their prayers and repentance, on repairing, renewing, and improving their relationship with God. When they are engrossed in the spiritual components of the day, they do not experience the sensations of hunger and thirst, just as a reader might not realize that he is hungry or thirsty until he finishes the book. (Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 133.)

1. Mishnah Yoma 8:1 – The five restrictions of Yom Kippur.

On Yom Kippur it is forbidden to eat, drink, wash, anoint, wear leather shoes, and have marital relations.

יום הכפורים אסור באכילה ובשתיה וברחיצה ובסיכה ובנעילת הסנדל ובתשמיש המטה.

If the purpose of fasting is not physical suffering, what is it intended to achieve? The simplest answer is that it is a way of ignoring our physical needs and focusing entirely on our spiritual side.

2. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. I, p. 267 – On Yom Kippur, we ignore our physical needs and focus upon our spiritual needs.

Through fasting and humbling oneself one merits to distance himself from his animalistic nature – the world of the physical – and to come close to connecting with God.

ע"י הצום והכניעה והשפלות זוכה להתרחק מטבע הבהמיות – עולם החומר, ולהתקרב ולהתדבק בהש"ת.

3. Maharal, Drashah L'Shabbat Teshuvah – We become like angels.

All of the mitzvot that God has commanded us to do on this great and holy day are intended to

וכן כל המצוות שצוה השם יתעלה ביום הגדול והקדוש הכל לסלק הגופניות שבאדם עד שהוא כמו מלאך

remove physicality from a person until he reaches the level of an angel. Therefore, we are commanded to afflict ourselves, in order to remove or lessen our physicality so that we can become as holy as the angels ...

God commanded the five afflictions of Yom Kippur so that the soul will not be constricted by the body ... and since the soul has five names: *nefesh*, *ruach*, *neshamah*, *yechidah*, and *chayah*, this is an indication that there are five aspects to the soul ... Corresponding to this we have the five afflictions, to remove physicality [on all five levels].

לגמרי. ולפיכך צוה לענות נפשו, הכל כדי לסלק ולמעט את הגוף עד שיהיה האדם קדוש כמו מלאך...

וביום הכפורים צוה השם יתעלה למעט הגוף ולענות הנפש בחמשה ענויים, ואז אין הנפש מיושבת בגוף, והיא נבדלת לבדה לעצמה מסולק מן הגופניות והוא כמו מלאך. ומפני כי יש לנפש חמשה שמות נפש רוח ונשמה יחידה חיה, נמצא שיש חמשה דברים בנפש... וכנגד זה חמשה ענויים למעט ולסלק הגופניות.

4. **Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner, Pachad Yitzchak, Rosh HaShanah 33:10 – There is a fundamental difference between fasting on Yom Kippur and fasting on other fast days.**

Fasting [on the other fast days] for repentance stems from the fact that fasting denies our bodily needs, whereas the fast of Yom Kippur stems from the fact that the soul does not need physical nourishment [i.e., because we are elevated on Yom Kippur, we don't need food].

תענית מדרכי התשובה היא משום דתענית היא בניגוד לצרכי הגוף, וצום יום הכפורים הוא משום דאכילה איננה מצרכי הנפש.

Another reason for fasting is to remove all distractions so that we can focus on the essence of the day.

5. **Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah #313 – Removing distractions.**

A reason for the mitzvah [of Yom Kippur], is that as a result of God's kindness for His creations He established one day each year for them to atone for their sins through repentance ...

Therefore, we are commanded to fast on this day, since food and drink, as well as the other physical pleasures, awaken the materialistic side of man and lure him to desire and sin, and can distract a person from seeking the truth, namely, serving God ...

It is not fitting for a person who will be judged by God to come to his judgment in a state of distraction by the physical world and by food and drink. For a person is judged according to his actions at that very time. Therefore, it is beneficial for man to elevate his spirituality and reduce his connection to the physical world on that honorable day, in order that he should be worthy and able to receive forgiveness without his [physical] desires preventing him from doing so.

משרשי המצוה, שהיה מחסדי השם על כל בריותיו לקבוע להם יום אחד בשנה לכפר על החטאים עם התשובה...

ולכן נצטוונו להתענות בו, לפי שהמאכל והמשתה ויתר הנאות חוש המישוש יעוררו החומר להמשך אחר התאוה והחטא, ויבטלו צורת הנפש החכמה מחפש אחר האמת שהוא עבודת האל...

ואין ראוי לעבד ביום בואו לדין לפני אדוניו לבוא בנפש חשוכה ומעורבת מתוך המאכל והמשתה, במחשבות החומר אשר היא בתוכו, שאין דנין את האדם אלא לפי מעשיו שבאותה שעה, על כן טוב לו להגביר נפשו החכמה ולהכניע החומר לפניו באותו היום הנכבד, למען תהיה ראויה ונכונה לקבל כפרתה ולא ימנענה מסך התאוות...

PART B. WHAT'S WRONG WITH WEARING LEATHER SHOES?

The reasons behind the afflictions of Yom Kippur explain all but one of the five – wearing leather shoes. Why is it specifically shoes that are not allowed (rather than banning the sitting in comfortable chairs, for example)?

1. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, Ruach Chaim on Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers), Ch. 1, Mishnah 1 – Freeing the soul from the body.

The essence of the soul is its upper source, which is the main dwelling place of our soul. Part of it descends into the body, which functions as a “shoe” for the soul. Just like the shoe is not a garment for the whole body, just [a covering] for the bottom part of it [i.e. the feet], so too the body is not a garment cloaking the entire soul. Rather, it functions as a covering for just the lower part of the soul. The body is like a “shoe” to the soul, cloaking only the lower part of it, and this is the meaning of “remove your shoes from your feet” [which God said to Moshe at the Burning Bush], meaning [remove] the body.

עצם הנפש – שרשו העליון, ששם עיקר מדור הנשמה. רק משתלשל ממנה מקצתה בגוף, כי הגוף הוא רק כמו נעל להנשמה, וכמו הנעל אינו מלבוש רק לקצה התחתון של הגוף כן הגוף אינו מלבוש רק לקצה התחתון של הנשמה, ונעל נקרא הגוף בחינת סוף הרגליים של הנשמה, וז"ש “של נעליך מעל רגליך” וגו', היינו הגוף.

2. Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 135 – To relate to God on a spiritual level.

The shoe is a metaphor for the human body and physicality. Just as the shoe encloses that part of the body which comes in contact with the world, so too the body encases the component of the soul which interfaces this world and allows it to interact with finite physicality. As our bodies are covered with our skin, so too, shoes are made of animal skin, leather. When God wants us to ignore our physical elements and try to relate to Him only on a spiritual level, He commands us to remove our leather shoes. This is the reason Moses was told to remove his shoes during prophecy, while on holy ground. This was an experience of the soul, not the body.

So too on Yom Kippur, when we focus entirely on the soul and ignore the body completely, it is appropriate that we avoid wearing that which most symbolizes the body – the leather shoe.

To underscore our spiritual emphasis, many people wear white clothing, symbolic of the heavenly angels.

3. Rema, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 610:4 – We wear white as if we were angels.

... There are those who are accustomed to wear clean white clothing on Yom Kippur, symbolic of the Ministering Angels.

...יש שכ' שנהגו ללבוש בגדים לבנים נקיים ב"כ דוגמת מלאכי השרת.

PART C. REFRAINING FROM WORK

In addition to the five afflictions, which enable us to focus on the spirituality of the day, Yom Kippur is also a form of Shabbat when various forms of creative work called *melachah* are forbidden.

1. Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah #317 – Work is forbidden on Yom Kippur to prevent us from being distracted.

The mitzvah to refrain from work on Yom Kippur – The rationale for this mitzvah is that we should not be distracted by anything, and so that we are able to focus all our thoughts and intentions on asking for forgiveness and pardon from the Master of everything, [specifically] on this day which has been designated for forgiveness from the day that the world was created.

מצות שביתה ממלאכה ביום הכפורים – משרשי המצוה... כדי שלא נהיה טרודים בשום דבר ונשים כל מחשבותינו וכל כוונתנו לבקש מחילה וסליחה מאת אדון הכל ביום זה, שהוא נכון לסליחת העוונות מיום שנברא העולם.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:

- ≈ There are five restrictions on Yom Kippur: eating, drinking, bathing, applying ointments/lotions, wearing leather shoes, and having marital relations. Since the whole purpose of Yom Kippur is to get closer to God, it is necessary to temporarily suppress our physical needs in order to enable us to focus on our spiritual (re)connection with God. By suppressing our physical aspects we liken ourselves to the angels.
- ≈ The five restrictions on Yom Kippur correspond to the five levels of the soul, the *nefesh*, *ruach*, *neshamah*, *yechidah*, and *chayah*. We suppress these five physical needs in order for the soul – in all its levels – to come to the fore.
- ≈ Fasting on Yom Kippur is of a different nature than fasting on the other fast days. The point of fasting on Yom Kippur is not purely to deny the physical, but rather an expression that one has attained a level of spirituality where food is simply unnecessary.
- ≈ It is forbidden to wear leather shoes, because shoes made from leather – being the skin of animals – represent the cloaking of the soul, which we reveal on Yom Kippur. We remove our shoes, and in so doing allow for the soul to emerge.
- ≈ It is forbidden to work on Yom Kippur so that we can focus all our energies on the essence of the day, namely teshuvah.

SECTION IV. FRAMEWORK FOR INTROSPECTION AND CHANGE – THE YOM KIPPUR SERVICE

As the previous sections have explained, Yom Kippur is the day when we introspect in order to clarify our mission in life. To move forward, we need to repair the past and gain reconciliation with God and with those we have wronged. We observe the five prohibitions of the day to help enable us to focus on the essentials.

We will now examine the majestic Yom Kippur Service that integrates and orchestrates the process of teshuvah, reflection, and personal growth. The medium of the day is *tefillah* (prayer) when we introspect and speak directly with God. (For more on tefillah see the Morasha class on Prayer). The Service also includes public readings from the Torah and the prophets highlighting central themes of the day.

PART A. THE PRAYERS OF YOM KIPPUR

The prayers of Yom Kippur are an integral part of the day's observance, the central theme of many of them being the request for forgiveness.

1. Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, *The Book of Our Heritage*, p. 83 – Overview of the Yom Kippur services.

We pray five prayers on Yom Kippur:

Maariv, Shacharit, and Minchah that are established [to be said] daily; Mussaf, which was instituted corresponding to the additional offerings that were brought in the Temple on Shabbat and the festivals; and the fifth prayer, called Neilah, is in honor of the holiness of this special day. We only say this prayer on Yom Kippur. For at this time the gates of the Inner Sanctuary of the Temple were locked. In addition, the Gates of Mercy are about to be locked. Neilah was established in order to awaken mercy at the time of the locking of the Gates.

חמש תפילות מתפללים ביום הכיפורים:

ערבית, שחרית ומנחה, הקבועות בכל יום: מוסף, שנקבעה לכל שבת, חג ומועד, כנגד המוספים שהקריבו במקדש: ותפילה חמשית – לכבוד קדושת היום המיוחד הזה, שאין מתפללין אותה בזמן הזה אלא ביום הכיפורים בלבד, ונקראת נעילה, לפי שבאותה שעה ננעלו שערי ההיכל בבית המקדש, וגם שערי רחמים עומדים להנעל, ונתקנה כדי לעורר רחמים בזמן נעילת שערים.

i. Kol Nidrei (Renunciation of all vows)

Kol Nidrei, the prayer renouncing the vows we undertook during the previous year, is recited just before sunset and the ushering in of Yom Kippur. It is a most powerful, emotional commencement. The entire congregation rises and the holy Torah scrolls are held by congregants. There is a palpable recognition that we are all standing before God as the *chazzan* chants Kol Nidrei. One might ask, of all possible openings for Yom Kippur why the renunciation of vows?

1. ArtScroll Machzor, Yom Kippur, p. 52 – The reason we recite Kol Nidrei just before Yom Kippur commences.

Kol Nidrei emphasizes for us the extreme gravity that the Torah attaches not only to formal vows and oaths, but to the general concept that one must keep his word ... Consequently, when we preface the Yom Kippur prayers not with pleas for forgiveness, but with a declaration regarding vows, we are reminding ourselves of the importance of scrupulously honoring our commitments. Thus we begin Yom Kippur with the recognition that a Jew's word is sacred ... It is indicative of the gravity Judaism attaches to vows and promises that the Jew prefaces his Yom Kippur prayers for forgiveness and repentance with Kol Nidrei, we cannot make peace with God until we absolve ourselves from the grievous sin of violating our word.

Furthermore, since the crux of Yom Kippur is our articulated commitment to personal improvement throughout the upcoming year (see section on viduy below), we must take clear responsibility for what we say.

Kol Nidrei is also a natural expression of awareness of the holy day that we are about to enter. What can match the awesome sanctity of the Day of Atonement?

2. Rabbi Reuven Leuchter – The great sanctity of Yom Kippur outshines any attempt to be spiritual.

There is a very simple explanation [as to why we recite Kol Nidrei on Yom Kippur]: A vow is an expression of something that a person determined appropriate to undertake. That is why he vowed to do it. But in light of the great sanctity of Yom Kippur, whatever a person thought throughout the year is simply null and void. Even vows that a person may make in order to be a more righteous person at this point become worthless.

יש לזה טעם מאוד פשוט: הנה נדר הוא ביטוי לזה, שהאדם רואה דבר מסוים שכדאי לו לעשות, וע"כ הוא נודר. אבל קדושת יום"כ היא כל כך גדולה, שכל מה שהאדם חשב במשך השנה הוא בטל ומבוטל לאור היום הגדול הזה – אפילו הנדרים שהוא נדר כדי שיהיה צדיק יותר, גם הם כעת לא שווים....

By renouncing our vows in preparation for the atonement of Yom Kippur, we are also giving expression to our desire to return to our essential selves on this day.

3. Rabbi Avi Shafran, "The Allure of Kol Nidrei," www.aish.com – In Kol Nidrei we renounce all that is external to our pure essence.

We are all compelled, or at least strongly influenced, by any of a number of factors extrinsic to who we really are. We make pacts – unspoken, perhaps, but not unimportant – with an assortment of devils: self-centeredness, jealousy, anger, desire, laziness ...

Such weaknesses, though, are with us but not of us. The sage Rabbi Alexandri, the Talmud teaches (Berachot, 17a), would recite a short prayer in which, addressing God, he said: "Master of the universes, it is revealed and known to You that our will is to do Your will, and what prevents us is the 'leaven in the loaf' [i.e. the inclination to do bad] ..." What he was saying is that, stripped of the rust we so easily attract, sanded down to our essences, we want to do and be only good.

Might Kol Nidrei carry that message no less? Could its declared disassociation from vows strike our hearts as a renunciation of the "vows," the unfortunate connections, we too often take upon ourselves? If so, it would be no wonder that the prayer moves us so.

ii. Baruch Shem Kevod ...

Throughout the year, when we recite the Shema, we say the verse of "Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity" silently. On Yom Kippur, both in the evening and morning Shema, this verse is said out loud, in unison.

1. Tur, Orach Chaim 619:2 – Only on Yom Kippur do we say *Baruch Shem Kevod*... out loud.

It is customary to say *Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuto L'Olam Va'ed* aloud, and there is a basis for this [custom] brought in the Midrash on Parshat Va'etchanan, which states that when Moshe went up to the heavens, he heard the angels praising God with *Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuto L'Olam Va'ed*, and he brought this [praise] down to the Jewish people.

ונוהגין לומר ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד בקול רם, וסמך לדבר במדרש ואלה הדברים רבה בפרשת ואתחנן כשעלה משה לרקיע שמע למלאכי השרת שהיו מקלסין להקב"ה – ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד והורידו לישראל.

Throughout the year, this praise is recited softly since the Jewish people have transgressions. However, on Yom Kippur when we are purified from our transgressions, we are compared to angels and can therefore say *Baruch Shem Kevod* out loud (See Devarim Raba, V'etchanan 2:36).

iii. Viduy (Confession)

Viduy, confession, is an integral part of the Yom Kippur service; we say it each of the five times we pray the Shemoneh Esrei on Yom Kippur, both in the individual Shemoneh Esrei (at the end) and in the repetition of each Shemoneh Esrei (in the middle) by the *chazzan*. It is also recited in the individual Shemoneh Esrei in the Minchah before Yom Kippur, totalling ten times.

1. The ArtScroll Siddur, p. 778 – Confessing is a prerequisite to repentance.

The confession of sins is an essential part of repentance. It is human nature for people to rationalize their own shortcomings in their own minds as unavoidable or even to define them as virtues. As long as someone refuses to acknowledge his wrongdoings, he cannot repent sincerely. So important is the confession, not only to the process of repentance but also to the Jew's chance to survive the Heavenly judgment, that the Sages ordained that the confessional be recited the afternoon before Yom Kippur, lest illness or death prevent someone from praying on Yom Kippur itself.

2. Yom Kippur Machzor – Confession can be a simple statement of contrition offered to God.

Our God and God of our fathers, may our prayers come before You. Do not hide from our pleas. For we are not so insolent or obstinate to say before You, "Our God, and the God of our fathers, we are righteous and we have not transgressed," rather we and our ancestors have transgressed ...

אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו תבא לפניך תפלתנו ואל תתעלם
מתחנונו שאין אנחנו עזי פנים וקשי ערף לומר לפניך
ה' אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו צדיקים אנחנו ולא חטאנו
אבל אנחנו ואבותינו חטאנו...

3. Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah (Laws of Repentance) 2:3 – Confession is accompanied by a sincere resolution to change.

One who confesses with words but who has not committed in his heart to leave the sin is compared to someone who immerses in a ritual bath with an impure creature in his hand – his immersion does not help until he throws the creature away. Along these lines it is said, "One who acknowledges and leaves sin will be treated mercifully."

כל המתודה בדברים ולא גמר בלבו לעזוב הרי זה דומה
לטובל ושרץ בידו שאין הטבילה מועלת לו עד שישליך
השרץ וכן הוא אומר ומודה ועוזב ירוחם...

iv. Service of the High Priest

In the repetition of Mussaf by the *chazzan*, we relate the service that the High Priest would perform on Yom Kippur in the times of the Temple. In those times, the Jewish people would receive atonement through this service. Nowadays, since the Temple no longer exists, retelling the service of the High Priest on Yom Kippur can contribute to our atonement.

1. **Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 138 – Recounting the Avodah, the service of the High Priest in the Temple on Yom Kippur.**

The Mussaf (Additional Service) of Yom Kippur morning describes the drama and significance of the High Priest's service in the Jerusalem Temple on Yom Kippur. The High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies, the innermost sanctum of the Temple only once a year, on Yom Kippur. There he would pray for the Jewish people's forgiveness and bring special offerings and incense. Mussaf describes the details of this service and the fervent prayers that the High Priest and the people recited while it was performed.

2. **Hoshea (Hosea) 14:3 – Without the Temple, our prayers replace the sacrifices.**

So we will render for bulls [i.e. sacrifices] the offering of our lips [i.e. prayer].

ונשלמה פרים שפתינו.

Aside from the description of the service of the High Priest that we recite during our prayer service, the Torah reading of the day also describes how this service was to be performed. For insights into the other readings of the day, see Part B below.

3. **Vayikra, 16:7-10 – The Torah reading details the sacrifice of the two goats on Yom Kippur during the Temple Era.**

“And he [Aaron] shall take two goats and stand them before God at the Tent of Meeting. And Aaron shall cast lots on the two goats, one is for God, one is for Azazel. And Aaron will present the goat upon which the lottery fell for God as a sin offering. And the goat upon which the lottery fell for Azazel shall be stood alive before God to make atonement upon him, to send him to Azazel in the desert.”

ולקח את שני השעירים והעמיד אתם לפני ה' פתח אהל מועד. ונתן אהרן על שני השעירים גרלות גורל אחד לה' וגורל אחד לעזאזל. והקריב אהרן את השעיר אשר עלה עליו הגורל לה' ועשהו חטאת. והשעיר אשר עלה עליו הגורל לעזאזל יעמד חי לפני ה' לכפר עליו לשלח אתו לעזאזל המדברה.

4. **Based on Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch, Vayikra 16:10 – There is much symbolism behind the service of the Two Goats.**

Here is the representation of two creatures, originally completely identical, which proceed on two entirely contrasting paths. Both are placed together in a similar way before God at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The decision whether to go “toward God” or to go to “Azazel” hovers over both of them in exactly the same way. Their fate through lottery is decided based on what is fitting for them. The one designated “toward God” gets admitted to the Holy of Holies, where the ideal of a Jewish Torah life perfects itself as the bearer of Godliness on earth. The other, designated for Azazel, remains untouched, at the entrance of the Sanctuary, and is sent out of its precincts, away from the sphere of human habitation into the desert. Having turned its back on the Sanctuary, it ends the uncultivated living it had preserved for itself.

Each one of us is a “*seir*” (goat). Each of us has the power to resist the demands made on our will power. It is in the way we use this power that the worthiness or worthlessness of our moral existence depends. We can use it in attachment to God in resisting all internal and external temptation and considerations to become a *seir* to God. Or we can use it in obstinate refusal of God and His holy laws of morality. This latter recourse is reflected in the etymology of the term לעזאזל – using one's strength for obstinacy (עז) for no meaningful future (אזל).

5. **Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah #364 – In absence of the Temple, the Altar, and the Seir HaMishtaleach, the only tool we have is teshuvah.**

Our Sages said that the *Seir HaMishtaleach* brought atonement when one did teshuvah for all sins that were light or serious; purposeful or accidental; whether known or unknown ...

And now that, because of our sins, we do not have a Temple or an Altar to atone for us, we only have teshuvah. Teshuvah atones for all sins; even if one had been entirely evil his whole life, but completely repents at the end of it, his evil ways are no longer mentioned.

ואמרו זכרונם לברכה [מתני' ריש שבועות] ששעיר המשתלח היה מכפר כשעשה תשובה על כל עבירות שבתורה הקלות והחמורות בין שעבר עליהן בזדון או בשגגה בין שהודע לו או לא הודע לו...

ועכשיו בעוונותינו שאין לנו מקדש ולא מזבח כפרה אין לנו אלא תשובה, והתשובה מכפרת על כל העבירות, ואפילו היה רשע גמור כל ימיו ועשה תשובה שלמה באחרונה אין מזכירין לו שוב רשעו.

v. Neilah

The culmination of Yom Kippur is the Neilah prayer, said at dusk just as Yom Kippur is coming to a close, in which we ask God to seal our fate for good.

1. **Mishnah Berurah 623:3 – Neilah.**

In the Neilah prayer we ask that God “seal” us instead of “inscribe” [us in the Book of Life]. For during Neilah the Heavenly judgment that was written for each person on Rosh HaShanah is sealed, whether for good or for bad.

One should make a great effort to motivate himself during this prayer for it is the culmination of both the Ten Days of Teshuvah and of Yom Kippur, since one's fate is decided by the sealing of the judgment. And if not now, when?

Therefore, even if one is weak from fasting, nevertheless he should strengthen himself to pray with pure and clear thoughts, and to take upon himself the commitment to do teshuvah sincerely and truthfully. For one who comes to purify himself is assisted by Heaven [Yoma38b] and will be sealed in the Book of Good Life.

וכן כשמגיע ל"וכתוב" יאמר "וחתום" וכן יאמר "בספר חיים וכו' נזכר ונחתם". כי בנעילה הוא חתימת הגז"ד שנכתב בר"ה על בני אדם לטוב או לרע.

ויזדרזו מאד בתפלה זו כי תכלית כל העשי"ת הוא יוה"כ ותכלית יוה"כ הוא תפלת נעילה שהכל הולך אחר החיתום ואם לא עכשיו אימתי

ולכן אף אם חלש הוא מחמת התענית מ"מ יאזור כגבור חלציו להתפלל במחשבה זכה וברורה ולקבל ע"ע גדרי התשובה באמת והבא לטהר מסייעין אותו ויחתם בספר חיים טובים.

vi. The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy

A powerful prayer that is recited on Yom Kippur in a quorum of ten is known as the *Yud Gimmel Midot*, the Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy. God Himself taught this special prayer to Moshe as a key to Divine Mercy, to be invoked when all else has failed. Moshe used this prayer when he begged God to forgive the Jews after the Golden Calf. Since ultimately God forgave the Jews on Yom Kippur for the sin of the Golden Calf, we therefore recite the Thirteen Attributes many times during the prayers of the day.

1. **Shemot 34: 6-7 – The Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy.**

And the Lord passed before [Moshe] and proclaimed, “Lord, Lord, God, Compassionate and Gracious, Slow to Anger, and Abundant in Kindness and Truth. Preserver of Kindness for thousands of generations, Forgiver of iniquity, willful sin, and error, and Who cleanses.”

ויעבור ה' על פניו ויקרא ה' ה' קל רחום וחנון ארך אפים ורב חסד ואמת נוצר חסד לאלפים נשא עון ופשע וחטאה ונקה.

2. **Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah 17b – God showed Moshe how the Jewish people can attain forgiveness through the Thirteen Attributes.**

“And God passed before [Moshe] and called out [the Thirteen Attributes]...” Rabbi Yochanan said, “Were it not written in Scripture we would never have imagined such a thing, but this comes to teach us that God wrapped Himself, as it were, [in a tallit] like a *chazzan* and showed Moshe how to pray. [God] said to [Moshe], ‘Whenever the Jewish people sin, they should act like this and I will pardon them.’”

ויעבר ה' על פניו ויקרא, אמר רבי יוחנן: אלמלא מקרא כתוב אי אפשר לאומרו, מלמד שנתעטף הקדוש ברוך הוא בשליח צבור, והראה לו למשה סדר תפלה. אמר לו: כל זמן שישראל חוטאין - יעשו לפני כסדר הזה, ואני מוחל להם.

It is significant that we do not request anything from God in this prayer, not even His forgiveness. All we do is mention God's attributes. What sort of prayer is this if we are not actually asking for anything? In truth, however, this is our greatest prayer because God deals with us in proportion to the extent that we recognize His power and His Attributes in this world. By expressing the Thirteen Attributes in prayer, the more we recognize God's Attributes, the more God will reciprocate and act with us in kind.

3. **Ramban (Nachmanides), Emunah U'Bitachon, Ch. 19 (Kitvei HaRamban, Vol. II p. 419) – The way we think of God, so He acts towards us.**

You should know, that whenever one thinks in his heart [about one of] God's Name[s] [i.e., one of God's Attributes] ... there is an awakening [so to speak] before God according to the attribute which that person ascribes to Him.

ודע כי כל זמן שאדם מחשב בתוך לבו שמו של הקב"ה... יש לפניו התעוררות כפי מחשבת מעלת החושב.

As the following source shows, accessing the power of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy is not limited to verbal expression or intellectual recognition alone.

4. **Radbaz, Metzudat David Zimra, Mitzvah #11 – Acting in accordance with the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy is the key to benefiting from their power of forgiveness.**

Moshe's prayer was not accepted just because he mentioned God's Attributes. What the Sages meant when they said that “a covenant was sealed with the Thirteen Attributes, that we will not be left empty-handed,” and when they said that “we learn that God wrapped Himself up like a *chazzan* and said that ‘whenever the Jewish

ולא בהזכרת מדותיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא תקובל תפילתו (של משה רבינו). ולזה נתכוונו רז"ל שאמרו ברית כרותה ל"ג מידות שינן חזירות ריקם ואמרו מלמד שנתעטף הקדוש ברוך הוא בשליח צבור ואמר כל זמן שישראל יעשו כסדר הזה אני מוחל להם. הכוונה כשיעשו כסדר מידותיו לא שיזכירו אותם בפה.

people act like this, I will pardon them,” the intent is that they should act in accordance with His Attributes, not merely mention them verbally.

One who understands that God “behaves” in a certain way and emulates His behavior will be treated by God in a like manner. That is what God meant when He said, “they should act like this and I will pardon them,” i.e. act in line with these merciful attributes. If we act in accordance with God’s Attributes of Mercy, God will act mercifully with us as well.

PART B. READINGS FROM THE TORAH AND PROPHETS

In addition to the prayers unique to Yom Kippur, there are specific readings on Yom Kippur from the Torah and the prophets that reflect important themes of the day. The morning reading is about the Yom Kippur service that was performed in the Temple, which is also recited during Mussaf (see Part A of this section).

During Minchah we read about the forbidden relationships. Why, on the holiest day of the year, when we are focused on spiritual ideals, do we read this portion?

1. Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, Sefer HaToda’ah p. 67 – Why do we read the *arayot* (forbidden relationships) on Yom Kippur?

From here [the reading of the *arayot* on Yom Kippur] we see hinted that even if man elevates himself in holiness until the heavens, he should not trust that he has been saved from the swaying of the evil inclination and most coarse deeds. On this holy day when all Jews are purified and become like angels, the Reader reads before them the section of immoral acts and warns them not to act immorally.

מכאן רמז לאדם שאפילו יתעלה במעלות הקדושה עד לשמים, אל יבטח בעצמו שכבר ניצל מפיתוי היצר הרעים והגסים ביותר, שכן בסוף היום הקדוש שכל ישראל נודככו ונעשו כמלאכים, עומד הקורא וקורא לפנייהם בפרשת עריות ומוזהיר אותם לבלתי עשות מחוקות התועבות.

On Yom Kippur afternoon we read about the prophet Yonah, sent by God to admonish the non-Jewish people of Nineveh to do teshuvah. He initially attempted to run away from this mission, for he reasoned that they would indeed repent, which would reflect negatively on the Jewish people as the Jews did not repent.

Additionally, Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, which God describes as the “staff of My anger” (Yeshayahu/Isaiah 10:5). Yonah knew that Assyria would be used to punish the Jewish people – indeed, the Assyrians exiled the Ten Tribes – and he therefore did not wish to rebuke them. Instead, he wanted that their quota of sin would be filled so that they would be destroyed and would not harm the Jewish people.

2. Talmud Bavli, Ta’anit 16a – Why the book of Yonah is read on Yom Kippur.

[At the time when the community gathers to do teshuvah] the eldest and wisest person says, “My brothers, your fasting and wearing sack cloth [a sign of teshuvah] will *not* cause God to turn around. Rather, your teshuvah and good deeds will be the cause. For example, regarding the people of Nineveh, the verse does *not* say,

הזקן שבהן אומר לפנייהן ... אחינו, לא שק ותענית גורמים, אלא תשובה ומעשים טובים גורמים. שכן מצינו באנשי נינוה שלא נאמר בהם “וירא האלהים את שקם ואת תעניתם”, אלא “וירא האלהים את מעשיהם כי שבו מדרך הרעה.”

“God saw their sack cloth and fasting,” rather it says, “God saw their actions because they had returned from their evil ways” [Yonah 3:10].

The Gaon of Vilna interprets the book of Yonah as a metaphor for our mission in life. Thus, the book of Yonah is highly relevant to the essence of the day of Yom Kippur.

3. Vilna Gaon, Aderet Eliyahu, Yonah 1:3 – The prophecy of Yonah as a metaphor for our mission in life.

“Yonah found a boat heading for Tarshish.” This world is compared to the ocean. The World to Come and the Garden of Eden are compared to the dry land. One who sets sail on the sea does not intend to sail forever; the goal is to transport goods to the dry land.

This world is compared to the ocean and the challenges we encounter are the waves. Our bodies are compared to the ship and through it we cross the ocean. So too, in this world our bodies contain our soul which we bring to the World to Come.

וימצא אניה: ועניינו כי העולם הזה דומה לים ועוה"ב
וג"ע דומה ליבשה שכל ענין יורדי הים אינם יורדים
להשתקע שם אלא להביא סחורה ליבשה.

וכן נמשל עוה"ז לים וצרות עוה"ז לגלים... וגוף דומה
לספינה שע"י יורדים לים כן הנשמה ע"י הגוף בעוה"ז
באה לעוה"ב.

The story of Yonah teaches us that we cannot hide from our mission in life. The world needs us.

4. Ibid. 1:1 – The message for Nineveh was also intended for the Jewish people.

Everything God said to Yonah was then communicated to the Jewish nation so that each person would know why he was brought into this world: his purpose was to perfect himself and the whole world.

כל מה שאמר לו ה' יאמר הכל לישראל שידעו למה
באו לעולם שיתקנו כ"א וא' א"ע וגם כל העולם.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV:

- ≈ Yom Kippur has five prayers: Maariv; Shacharit; Mussaf; Minchah; and Neilah, which is a special prayer said only once a year, at the conclusion of Yom Kippur.
- ≈ The prayers of Yom Kippur are prefaced with Kol Nidrei, during which we renounce any vows we took upon ourselves during the previous year (explicitly or inadvertently). The point of Kol Nidrei is to emphasize that we must be committed to our word. Especially as we are now coming before God to repent, we must take our commitments seriously. It also demonstrates that we can begin anew.
- ≈ Viduy, confession, is a prerequisite for repentance.
- ≈ Nowadays, prayer replaces the atonement achieved by the High Priest's Yom Kippur service in the Temple.

- ≈ The Thirteen Attributes of God is a powerful prayer in which we invoke the Merciful Attributes of God; to the degree that we recognize God's Attributes, He will act toward us in kind.
- ≈ At Minchah we read about *arayot*, forbidden relationships, to remind us that even on such a lofty day, man does not entirely escape his baser instincts.
- ≈ The book of Yonah is about repentance and is therefore read on Yom Kippur. If the teshuvah of the people of Nineveh, who were completely evil, was accepted, then clearly there is hope for those who repent sincerely.

SECTION V. IMPLEMENTING A REALISTIC STRATEGY FOR REACHING ONE'S POTENTIAL

Now, at the end of a long, exhilarating day, we want to be sure that we can reach and maintain our overarching objectives of teshuvah and sustained personal growth. We find that there are two approaches to the teshuvah process.

1. **Rabbi Yissocher Frand, In Print, ArtScroll, p. 38 – There are two approaches to the teshuvah process.**

This Mishnah (cited in Section II. Part B. #3) is problematic. Why did Rabbi Akiva have to cite two separate verses in support of his statement? To answer this question Rabbi Hirsh Spector, the son of Rabbi Elchonon Spector, pointed out that there are two types of halachic purifications in water. In one, the person is required to completely immerse himself in a mikvah; in the other, it is sufficient for the Kohen to sprinkle even a drop of specially prepared water upon the person to become ritually pure again.

Similarly, said Reb Hirsch, there are two types of teshuvah. One is a complete teshuvah, which can be symbolized by complete immersion in a mikvah. But there is another level of teshuvah, which can be symbolized by the sprinkling of one drop of special water. The latter type of teshuvah is less complete, less dramatic; it builds up over the years, drop by drop, until a complete teshuvah is achieved.

There may be some people who go for the plunge, but the most successful practice is a commitment to measured, progressive, consistent growth year after year (see Morasha classes on Teshuvah). We need to decide on what is right for us, not too little, not too much. So, by the close of Neilah and the final shofar blast of Yom Kippur, we have brainstormed and committed to a grounded strategy for personal change and growth that will lead to achieving our mission in life.

Gemar Chatimah Tova!

CLASS SUMMARY:

WHY IS YOM KIPPUR SO CONDUCIVE FOR FOCUSING ON ONE'S MISSION IN LIFE?

Each one of us comes into this world with a unique combination of strengths. We are also brought into the world at a particular time when those powers are needed for the fulfillment of some part of the Divine plan. In our journey through life to perfect our character, we sometimes err; whether in our relationship with God; our

families, friends, and colleagues; or even with ourselves. Teshuvah and Yom Kippur were created so that man should have a mechanism to repair his mistakes in order to attain his life's mission.

HOW DOES YOM KIPPUR ENABLE A PERSON TO ERASE A PAST LIFE LADEN WITH MISTAKES?

Yom Kippur is a day imbued with an intrinsic spiritual energy of atonement and reconciliation. The significance of Yom Kippur is that God set aside one day for the Jewish people when their repentance is readily accepted and their sins can be easily erased. This rectifies and purifies all the spiritual damage caused by these sins and returns those who repent to their former level of holiness and closeness to God.

WHY ARE THE FIVE AFFLICTIONS, IN COMBINATION WITH REFRAINING FROM CREATIVE WORK, A PREREQUISITE FOR GREAT SPIRITUAL STRIDES ON YOM KIPPUR?

In our effort to discern and work on our mission in life and concentrate on teshuvah, we need to peel away the layers of the physical world. Since the ultimate goal of the restrictions on Yom Kippur is to get closer to God, it is necessary to temporarily suppress our physical needs so that we can better focus on our spiritual (re)connection with God.

HOW DO THE YOM KIPPUR PRAYERS AND READINGS PROVIDE AN INSPIRATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR INTROSPECTION AND PERSONAL GROWTH?

The Yom Kippur Service integrates and orchestrates the process of teshuvah, reflection, and personal growth. The medium of the day is tefillah (prayer) when we introspect and speak directly with God. The day begins with Kol Nidrei, with the recognition that a Jew's word is sacred. Throughout the year, when we recite the Shema, we say the verse of "Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity" silently. On Yom Kippur, both in the evening and morning Shema, we say it out loud to demonstrate that we are compared to angels praising God. Over the course of Yom Kippur there are five prayer services when we privately, and then communally, articulate our transgressions, commit to not repeating them, and make formal resolutions for personal change. The reading of the Prophet Yonah teaches us that we cannot hide from our mission in life; the world needs us.

HOW CAN I IMPLEMENT A REALISTIC STRATEGY TO REACH MY POTENTIAL IN LIFE?

There may be some people who look for dramatic short-term changes in their lives, but the most successful practice is a commitment to measured, progressive, consistent growth year after year.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING AND SOURCES

R' Yisroel Salanter, *Ohr Yisroel*, michtavim 3, 6, 10, 14,15, and parts of 30

R' Yitzchak Blazer, *Cochvei Ohr*, michtav 7.

Ramchal, Derech Hashem 4:7:6