

לעילוי נשמות  
הר"ר ישראל  
בן הר"ר יעקב ז"לFROM THE TEACHINGS OF OUR REBBE  
THE GAON AND TZADDIK  
REBBE YITZCHOK MYER MORGENSTERN SHLIT"A

# SEA OF WISDOM

## The Avodah of Yom Kippur

### Rejoicing in the King Himself

On every spiritual level, there exist two aspects: *atzmus*, the essence of the level itself, and *giluyim*, the light it emanates. This can be compared to the sun: in addition to its own inner light, the sun radiates light to extreme distances. Yom Kippur is the root of the entire year's *avodah* and all of its festivals. On Yom Kippur, one feels intense pleasure in his *dveykus* to Hashem Himself, which stands in contrast to the rest of the year, when the holiness of one's attachment to Hashem's essence is revealed through the effects of the *atzmus* which we can feel.

This experience of delight in Hashem Himself can be compared to a struggling person who is suddenly informed that he is actually the king's only child - all the royal riches really belong to him. Although the man's joy must be overwhelming when he finds this out, it is not necessarily observable from his outward behavior or attitude. His joy is deeply internal, because he finds joy in the new knowledge that he is privileged to be the beloved only child of the king. Similarly, on Yom Kippur a Jew delights in the fact that he is the unique son of the King of the universe.

"[The Kohen Gadol] would celebrate [lit. 'make'] a Yom Tov with his loved ones when he emerged from the holy of holies unscathed [on Yom HaKippurim after performing the service]." Concerning this, the Baal Sulam in his commentary on Zohar raised a number of points.

Was that day not a festival already? Why, then, does the gemara state that he "made it" a festival? He explained that since the main element of the *avodas Hashem* of the day is to enter the "inner sanctum" and experience profound joy in Hashem Himself, beyond all "revelations and lights" [more externalized experiences of Hashem's presence], this joy does not necessarily express itself externally. It is possible that it would manifest throughout the year instead, since the "light" of Hashem's essence that the Jewish people access through fasting on Yom Kippur shines throughout the entire year and its festivals.

### The Golden and the White Garments

The *avodas Hashem* of Yom Kippur has two aspects: the service conducted by the Kohen Gadol "outside" while wearing the golden vestments, and the service conducted "inside" the holy of holies in the white vestments. The Arizal taught that on Yom HaKippurim, the lights of *Arich* are revealed through the level of *Binah*. There is an aspect of service associated with *Binah*, which is the spiritual root of gold.

It is through this aspect that most people feel inspired to repent on Yom Kippur, to weep in regret over their sins and resolve to improve. And even though this is a very wonderful thing, and the person who experiences it is certainly fortunate, nevertheless this "outside" work is not the main element of the day. The essential aspect of the day is to experience the illumination of *Arich*, the pure pleasure in Hashem.

continued on page 2

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continued from page 1

And even if a person has yet to really feel a powerful arousal to repentance on Yom Kippur in the “external” sense of the “golden garments,” he should still know that the main power of forgiveness and atonement of the day lies in the “inner” work of the “white garments” - the light of *Arich*.

### “Unique and Exalted One, Turn to Your People”

When the Kohen Gadol would enter into the holy of holies, he would focus on and arouse the influence of the Divine Name that is referred to as ג'ל, the acronym of the phrase וכו' לעמך גאון... - *Unique and exalted One, turn to Your people, those who remember Your holiness* - from the Anah b'Koach *tefilah*. [The word ג'ל means to exult, or derive great pleasure.] The “exalted” - גאון in the phrase is meant to allude another, similar use of the word: כי גאון גאון... - *I will sing to Hashem, for He is greatly exalted*. At that time, the Kohen Gadol would ascend to a lofty level of attachment with the Creator's essence, as it were, and he felt incredible joy and exultation for being privileged to be the only child of the King. It was this feeling that radiated outward to all of the Jewish people - “Yisrael rejoices in his Maker, the children of Tzion exult in their King.”

Who can really comprehend the unique splendor and greatness of every single Jew? The Torah says that no one is permitted to be in the vicinity when the Kohen Gadol enters the inner sanctum to perform/experience this level of service. No one is permitted to intrude on the joy he feels in being the unique child of the King, because he is performing the service of the “Unique and Exalted One,” that he feels true and holy pride and glory. Every single Jew has such a portion in Hashem - “The portion of Hashem is His people, Yaakov is the lot of His heritage.” No one, not even the angels, has a right to intrude on this unique relationship, which is unique to every single Jew. Only the Shechinah itself can be present when the Kohen Gadol performs this *avodah* - he sees a vision of the Shechinah, which is the portion of every single Jew.

So even though each of us has the obligation to wash his feet and hands like the Kohen Gadol and put on the “golden garments” to do the work of *teshuvah* and self-affliction - the “outside” work - we must still remember that the essence of the day has still not been achieved. We must put on the “white garments” and rejoice with an inner exultation in the knowledge of our unique and intimate relationship with the Creator. In this way, the Jewish people are double-sealed with the innermost seal that binds us to Hashem Himself - this is the “pleasure and delight of the King”.

When the day draws on and a person begins to feel weakened by his fasting, and finds it difficult to pray properly, it is imperative that he remember that all of this stems from the “outer” aspect of the service. And even though he must certainly make his best effort to overcome his weakness, so that he can complete his

prayers properly, nevertheless he must know that his atonement really depends on the “inner” service. He must enter into the “inner sanctum” and feel what a joy and a privilege it is to have a unique relationship with the King. This feeling isn't contingent on how well his body is doing or even how much spiritual illumination he thinks he is getting. Rather, it is a simple and straightforward joy in the King Himself - it is transformative, it turns him “white” through and through. Even the angels who use “two wings to fly” - the wings of Divine love and fear - cannot be in the presence of a person who rejoices in the King Himself, without the articulation of “revelations.”

### Belief beyond Knowledge

On the tenth of Tishrei, when a Jew wants so much to enter the “inner sanctum,” he must first know that Hashem only wants to reveal Himself to those whose belief in Him transcends their knowledge and understanding. “The Rock, His deeds are perfect, for all His ways are just. He is a faithful G-d without iniquity, righteous and upright is He.” **All of the Creator's actions are for the good, and He always wants to bestow good upon His creations and lovingly bond with His children, but He has set a certain condition with them. The condition is that they must continue to have faith in Him even if the matter in question is beyond their understanding.** “For My thoughts are not your thoughts...” The attachment of a created being to his Creator is not contingent on how his body feels, or whether he feels spiritual illumination. Rather, he must devote himself completely to Hashem, in a way that transcends human understanding altogether. Then he will be privileged to enter the “inner sanctum” and rejoice and delight in Hashem Himself even if he is unsure whether or not he has done a proper *teshuvah*. The main thing is to fulfill the injunction, “Return, Yisrael, to Hashem your G-d.” He must return to Hashem Himself, knowing that Hashem transcends all externalized “revelations” and garments; everything and everyone is under His complete control - we are His, body and soul. This knowledge is what allows a person to bind himself to Hashem no matter what he feels or what level of *teshuvah* he has managed to reach.

### The Seal of the Kohen Gadol

It is for this reason that the Kohen Gadol must be married in order to perform the *avodah*, and why he may only take a wife who has never been with a man. This is critical because it is his job to uplift all of creation, which is the feminine aspect, to the absolute reality of Hashem Himself. On Yom Kippur, one must seal himself with the innermost seal - this parallels the *besulah* state of the bride of the Kohen Gadol. The word בתולה - *besulah* (a woman that was never married before) spells out לב תה'ו, this has a deeper meaning, which is *lev tohu* - that one who is “sealed with the innermost seal” has a “heart that is void” in the way of



holiness. What does it mean to have a “void heart”? The true tzaddik is “doubly-sealed” away from the desires of this world; he has no “heart” or desire for anything other than Hashem Himself. On Yom HaKippurim, the tzaddik is even “sealed” from desiring spiritual “lights and revelations” - from having ego-based longing for spiritual achievements - rather, he longs only to rejoice and delight in Hashem Himself. Because of this “double” sealing, the tzaddik isn’t bothered by the five types of afflictions of the day - he is able to even uplift spiritual pleasures to their source, so that they serve as a means by which he rejoices in attaching himself to the Creator.

The tzaddik does not want his *avodas Hashem* or *dveykus* to be contingent on any person feeling, as if it is only when his prayer and Torah study has been well and truly accomplished that he can feel connected with the King. Because, if that was the case, what would he do if he then saw that his fellow Jew did not quite manage to achieve what he had? He would feel pride and ego, and it would all be because he had failed to connect with Hashem Himself. If he had, he would know right away that “Hashem’s portion is His people” - every Jew is intrinsically connected with Hashem. This knowledge would make him worthy of a kind of vision, where he would be able to see and feel just how each and every Jew reveals the reality of Hashem’s essence to a greater degree than he does himself. This would inspire him to bind himself to other Jews. This was the *avodas Hashem* of the Kohen Gadol, to enter the place of the *Even Sh’tiyah* - the foundation stone of the universe, the one point that encompasses all of creation and every single Jew - and help the entire Jewish people to feel like a single entity, like one body.

## Hungering for Hashem

“He brought them into being in a desert region, in a desolate, howling wasteland [*tohu*—literally, ‘void’]. He encompassed them and granted them wisdom, protecting them like the pupil of His eye.” The verse refers to the aspect of the tzaddik who has come to the “sealed” level of the *besulah*, the “void heart,” whose desires are completely rectified and has attained personal purity. He has the power to uplift all of the souls, even those that are dispersed in a “desolate, howling wasteland.” This is why, as soon as we enter into the holiness of Yom HaKippurim, we declare by *Kol Nidrei* that, with the full agreement of Hashem and the community, we permit ourselves to pray together with the worst sinners. On a day when we ascend to delight in Hashem Himself, it is through the power of the Kohen Gadol who is the true tzaddik that the greatness and preciousness of each and every Jewish soul is revealed.

That being the case, it is imperative that as the holy day draws near we urge ourselves to repent for any shortcomings in personal purity so that we can wear the “white garments.” Let us not follow

after the heart’s worldly desires. Know that the power of human longing is such that it binds a person to that which he desires, and can even transform him into something like the object of his desires. For example, if a person has a powerful craving for a particular food, the force of his desire binds him to the Divine spark within that food, until he is encompassed with it. **If so, when a person longs to join with Hashem Himself, he truly is bound up together with Hashem. Wherever a person’s thoughts are, that’s where he is, and that’s where he’s going.**

The public reading of the incident of the deaths of Nadav and Avihu commemorates that it was in the merit of their self-sacrifice that the Jewish people were granted the light of Yom HaKippurim. On that day, it is precisely through abstaining from food and drink that a Jew receives spiritual vitality from the longing and hunger that he has for Hashem. As the *pasuk* states: “And to give them life in hunger...” There is great life-force to be found within the hunger and longing for closeness to Hashem - but not within the longing for “revelations and lights” or spiritual highs. Even though we must spend the day in the externals of the *avodah* - in prayers and regrets and resolutions - it is all so that we can come to the higher, inner light of *Arich* which is en clothed in *Binah*.

## Holy Vision

Generally, desire is a product of what one sees. It is for this reason that it is vital that a person visualize the countenance of the Kohen Gadol has he entered the holy of holies in his white garments to seclude himself with the Divine light. It’s for the same reason Chazal taught that one must pray in the direction of [literally, “to incline his heart to”] the holy of holies. **One must call out to Hashem “from the depths” - from the deepest part of himself to feel joy in Hashem Himself - because wherever his heart and mind are, that is where his desire and direction will take him. This is the main rectification of everything.**

The Baal HaTanya said that he does not seek the pleasures of this world, and not even the pleasures of the next world - all he wants is Hashem Himself. He meant to say that he is only seeking the light of faith and of Hashem’s unity, and he has no interest in “revelations and lights.” The truth is that the Creator is not really happy when a Jew takes pleasure in something other than Him. This could be compared to a rich man and a poor man. When the rich man is under the impression that it was through his wealth alone (given as charity to the poor man) that the poor man has managed to get back on his feet, he derives complete satisfaction. However, if he were to hear that the poor man had simultaneously benefited from the gifts of others, his joy would be incomplete. The same is true of a sage and his student. If his student has grown to wisdom, he is bound to feel great delight. However, if he finds that the student also studied under others, he may still be happy, but he will not be nearly as happy as he would have been had his

student's growth been entirely due to his own influence. We see that this is likewise true of our relationship with Hashem. When He sees that all we long for is Him, He takes pleasure in us. If He sees that we also derive pleasure from other things, His pleasure is diminished.

## Kapparos

When a person stands on the verge of the holy day, quaking with fear because he has yet to truly repent of his sins - and he even failed to take advantage of the opportunity to improve given by the *Aseres Yimei Teshuvah* - he has a question: How will I manage to "return to Hashem [my] G-d?" By what virtue will I stand before the King of kings on Yom HaKippurim? His answer lies in the *kapparos* ritual he performs just before the holy day. He must wake up when the rooster begins to crow and cry in an almost human voice. Hashem "gave Binah / Understanding to the rooster to distinguish between day and night." The rooster [*gever*, which also means "man"] represents the angel Gavriel and is associated with harsh judgments / *gevuros*; these judgments are themselves an aspect of yearning and longing. It is for this reason that the custom is to eat and drink a great deal on the day before Yom Kippur, it is our way of entering into the *gevuros* and the world of yearning and longing in the way of mitzvah. This is why Chazal emphasized the greatness of eating on the ninth of Tishrei, before the fast. However, the real *kapparah* is achieved with the designated rooster/hen has been slaughtered. The slaughtering is meant to drive home the point that it isn't the eating and the desiring worldly things even for the sake of mitzvah that is the true goal - the real atonement only comes when all of these desires are "killed" and redirected only toward Hashem Himself.

When we follow the path that has been described, we will find that the "inner" joy in Hashem Himself burst outward as a matter of course, and influences the "outside" as well. The reverberations of the joy to the "outside" are like the festivals - the true holidays that receives their light from Yom HaKippurim - and this is the "festival" that the Kohen Gadol would celebrate with his loved ones.

## "Let Your Soul Know Wisdom"

The *nefesh*, or the lower aspect of the soul, is a word that also indicates prayer. When human beings try to pray, they are naturally surrounded by all kinds of "snakes and scorpions" - the confusing thoughts and distractions that are a product of his inability to let go of his ego-driven desires. This is also true even when the desires are spiritual in nature - and that is why it is so easy to become distracted from prayer. Praying with a desire for spiritual success, holy as such a desire may seem, is not the true purpose of prayer. However, it is still true that on Yom HaKippurim we are meant to work our way up to the true purpose of prayer (the light of *Arich*) through the "outside service" of the form of prayer and repentance (the light of *Binah*).

This is the meaning of: דעה חכמה לנפשך והיא כתר לראשך - *Let your soul*

(*nefesh*) know (*d'ei*) wisdom (*Chochmah*) and it will be a crown (*Kesser*) for your head. Let your *nefesh*, which indicates your prayer and desire, "know wisdom" - be informed by the state of self-nullification associated with the *sefirah* of *Chochmah*. Through fasting and crying out in prayer on Yom HaKippurim, one must come to set aside their ego-driven desires for spiritual "lights." The truth is that such "lights," being external in nature, naturally wax and wane in intensity and accessibility, just like the moon.

This is why it is impossible that the longing to experience them serves as the basis of a person's *avodas Hashem* - how can they, when they are sometimes in eclipse? A person's *avodah* must be contingent on that which does not alter - and that is the desire to experience the joy of connecting with Hashem Himself. If you follow this path and "let your soul know wisdom," you will find that it is a "crown / *Kesser* to your head." You will be worthy of the crown of the holy day, to enter the inner sanctum of connection with Hashem safely, for it is only in the "outside" state that negative spiritual forces and distractions have any foothold.

Even if the "outer" service is where we find ourselves all year long, we must make every effort just this one day a year to follow the path of the true tzaddikim and set aside our natural desire for spiritual accomplishment. The author of the *Toras Chochom* would say that all of the *avodah* of Yom Kippur is only to prepare us for *Neilah*; and *Neilah* is only to prepare us for the declaration of Hashem's sovereignty that caps the prayer; and the declaration is only a preparation for the *shofar* blast that closes the day. The sound of the *shofar* is the sound of pure longing for attachment to Hashem, and when it rings out it draws down the highest possible *mochin* or aspects of holy awareness which are the pinnacles of the *sefiros* and all the worlds.

It is on Yom HaKippurim that we all beg Hashem to again declare, "I have forgiven in accordance with your words." When a Jew reaches this depth of simple joy in attachment to Hashem Himself, he has reached the essence of forgiveness. There were great tzaddikim who merited to literally hear the words "I have forgiven" - tzaddikim like the Apter Rav and Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. But, really, every single Jew can merit to hear this on some level when he feels the pure joy of connection with the Creator himself, the joy that is expressed in the final *shofar* blast that is an echo of the "sound of the great *shofar*" that will herald the era of Moshiach and the ultimate future.

May Hashem help us to prepare ourselves for the great day of Yom Kippur by nullifying our desires for all of the food and delights we will enjoy on the ninth of Tishrei. In the merit of "sealing" ourselves away from the desires of this world, may we be worthy of the fulfillment of the verse: "Then your light will burst forth like the dawn." The lights of Dovid HaMelech will then be revealed, and we will see Your Kingship, with the coming of our righteous redeemer to Tzion in mercy. Speedily and in our days. Amen

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