



THE JAFFA EDITION

YOM KIPPUR

תשפ"ז

BY DON JARASHOW



לע"נ • נח רפאל ז"ל בן ר' יוסף חיים הכהן • ישראל ז"ל בן ר' ישעיה הלוי



The Kotzer's Ladder

We associate the Yamim Noraim, and especially Yom Kippur, with teshuvah. Returning. Renewal. Purification.

We know it's an incredible opportunity. But starting over isn't always so simple. Life has momentum. We have our routines, our schedules, the people we deal with, the friends we spend time with, the places we go, the conversations we have, the way we do things. And once life gets moving, it's very hard to just stop, step aside, and honestly ask ourselves: Where am I? Where am I going?

I heard a sharp line from the Kotzker, quoted by Rav Sholom Kamenetzky.

The Kotzker was asked: Imagine two people on a huge ladder. One is standing on the very bottom rung, while the other is all the way at the top. Who is higher?

The Kotzker answered: It depends which direction they're going.

We're all standing somewhere on the ladder. Some people seem higher, some seem lower. But the rung we're standing on doesn't necessarily tell us where we truly stand.

The real question is: Which direction are we going?

On Pesach, we ask: What is the unique *chiyuv* of מצרים on Leil HaSeder? After all, we have a mitzvah to remember Yetzias Mitzrayim

every single day of our lives.

On Rosh Hashanah, we ask the same question. The *avodah* of the day is Malchiyus, to crown Hashem as our King. But don't we already do that every morning and every night when we say Krias Shema?

And then comes Yom Kippur.

We think of Yom Kippur as the great day of teshuvah. But teshuvah isn't something we wait all year to do. Three times a day, every day, we say השיבונו and סלח לנו in Shemoneh Esrei.

So what is different about Yom Kippur? What is the unique *avodah* of this day?

Rabbeinu Yonah, in Shaarei Teshuvah, gives us an insight into the unique *avodah* of Yom Kippur. The *chiyuv* of the day is not simply teshuvah. It is *taharah*. Purification.

As he writes:

וּמִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה מִן הַתּוֹרָה לְהַעִיר אָדָם אֶת רוּחוֹ
לְחֹזֵר בְּתַשׁוּבָה בְּיוֹם הַכְּפוּרִים שְׁנָאֵמַר: מְכַל
חַטָּאוֹתֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי ה' תִּטְהָרוּ. עַל כֵּן הִזְהִירוּ
הַקְּתוּב בְּשִׁטְהָר לִפְנֵי ה' בְּתַשׁוּבָתָם וְהָא
יִכְפֹּר עָלֵינוּ בְּיוֹם הַזֶּה לְטָהָר אוֹתָנוּ.

It is a mitzvas aseï for a person to awaken his spirit to return in teshuvah on Yom Kippur, as it says: 'From all your sins, before Hashem, you shall purify yourselves.' Therefore, the Torah warns us that we must purify ourselves before Hashem through our

teshuvah, and He will atone for us on this day in order to purify us.

The Torah is telling us: לְפָנֵי ה' תִּטְהָרוּ. On Yom Kippur, become pure before Hashem.

Sounds simple enough. Become pure.

But what does that actually mean? Pure thoughts? Pure actions? Stop doing certain things? Start doing others? What exactly does it mean for a person to become טהור?

And if there is one day of the year when we should know the answer to that question, it's Yom Kippur.

The Gemara in מנחות כט:, a famously quoted source, relates:

וּמִפְּנֵי מָה נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה בְּהֵ"י? מִפְּנֵי שְׂדוּמָה לְאַכְסֻדְרָה, שֶׁכָּל הָרוֹצֶה לֵיצֵאת יֵצֵא.
Why was this world created with the letter ה? Because it is shaped like an open structure, so that anyone who wants to leave can leave.

וּמֵאִי טַעְמָא תְּלִיא כְּרַעִיה?
And why is the leg of the ה suspended, leaving a small opening at the top?

דְּאִי הָדָר בְּתִשְׁבּוּבָה מְעִילִי לֵיה.
So that if a person returns in teshuvah, he can be brought back in.

The Gemara asks:

וְלִיעֵייל בְּהָךְ
Why can't he simply come back

through the same opening he left through?

לֹא מִסְתַּיְיעָא מִלְתָּא, כְּדָרִישׁ לְקִישׁ, דְּאָמַר רִישׁ לְקִישׁ: מֵאִי דְכָתִיב "אִם לְלִצִּים הוּא יִלְיָן וְלַעֲנוּיִם יִתֵּן חַיִּי"? בָּא לְשָׂהָר – מִסְתַּיְיעִין אוֹתוֹ, בָּא לְשִׁמָּא – פּוֹתְחִין לוֹ.

The Gemara answers:

Because it doesn't work that way. As Reish Lakish teaches: One who comes to purify himself is helped, while one who comes to make himself impure is simply given the opportunity to do so.

Rashi elucidates:

לֹא מִסְתַּיְיעָא מִלְתָּא-דִּהְבָּא לִיטְהָר בְּעֵי סִיוַע מִפְּנֵי יֵצֵר הָרַע, הַלֵּכךְ עֲבָדִי לֵיה סִיוַע פִּתַח יִתִּירָה.

A person who comes to purify himself needs assistance because of the *yetzzer hara*. The Arugas HaBosem explains that this refers to the *koach hatumah* created by the *aveirah* itself. When a person sins, when he exits, he creates a blockage. The entrance he walked out through is no longer so simple to walk back through. Therefore, Hashem gives him something remarkable: פתח יתירה, another opening. A new way back in.

Rav Dov Povarsky, the Ponovezh rosh yeshiva, takes this one step further in his *sefer Mussar Vedaas* (דף רעד). He makes it practical:

If Hashem is already helping the

*The real question is:
Which direction are we going?*

baal teshuvah, why not help him return through the same opening he left through? Why does he need a new opening, specifically at the top of the ה?

Because teshuvah is not about going back to where you fell — to the old routine of living right next to your old struggles and becoming your old self again. That opening is at the bottom. Hashem is giving you an opening at the top.

As the Navi says, שׁוּבוּהָ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד ה' אֱלֹהֵיךָ. Return, but how far? עַד ה' אֱלֹהֵיךָ. All the way up. All the way back to Hashem. Back to your connection with Him. Back to who you really are and where you truly belong. The son and daughter of the King. Restoring the untarnished, pristine being you truly are. Returning to your true, wholesome self.

So yes, that opening at the top of the ה is smaller. The climb is harder. But that is the process of teshuvah. That is בא לִיטְהָר. And that is the *taharah* of Yom Kippur.

Not a temporary fix. Not a spiritual Band-Aid that lasts until Motzai Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur asks us to change direction. To stop trying to get back into the same place we were before, and instead start climbing toward where we are capable of going.

And perhaps now we can understand the Kotzker's ladder on a more realistic and practical level.

We spend so much time looking at the rung we're standing on. How far

have I fallen? How much have I accomplished? How far am I from where I should be? But Yom Kippur asks us a different question: Which direction are you going?

Sometimes Yom Kippur forces even those who seem to be standing at the top of the ladder to ask themselves whether they are really climbing. And perhaps even more importantly, it speaks to the person who feels like he is standing all the way at the bottom.

Because sometimes it's hard to restart. It's hard to embark on this journey of *taharah*, to start climbing upward, to try to squeeze through that narrow opening at the top of the ה. We look at ourselves and feel like we're starting from the bottom. Like we're new to the game. Like everyone else is already somewhere up there and we're just beginning.

But the Kotzker is telling us that's not how the ladder works.

You may be standing on the lowest rung. You may have walked out through the bottom of the ה. But the moment you turn around and begin climbing upward, the moment you decide, "I want to become pure. I want to blockade my old self and create for myself a new, clean path," you are בא לִיטְהָר. And Hashem promises us: מְסִיעֵין אוֹתוֹ.

In truth, you're not "at the bottom." Because our place on the ladder is not defined only by the rung beneath our feet. It's defined by where we're heading.

That is לפני ה' תְּהָרָה. *Taharah* doesn't

mean that by Ne'ilah we have magically soared to the top. It means we have chosen to ascend toward the top. That is the process: starting from the bottom, with slow, persistent steps, based on the resolve to choose purity and the recognition of my true self.

So as the new year commences, maybe we're only one rung higher. Maybe we still have a long way to go. But we're climbing. And ultimately, that is the question of Yom Kippur and the journey of purity: Not only, "Where are you?" but "Where are you going?"

Looking for Aveiros?

Rebbe Yitzchak Meir of Zinkov *zt"l* once met a Yid who was deeply troubled by his *aveiros*. He shared with him a beautiful *pshat* that he had heard from his father, the Apter Rav *zt"l*.

The Navi says (*Yirmiyahu* 50:20):

בְּיָמִים הָהֵם וּבָעֵת הַהִיא נֹאֵם ה' יִבְקֹשׂ אֶת
עוֹן יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֵינָנוּ וְאֵת חַטָּאת יְהוּדָה וְלֹא
תִמְצְאֶנָּה כִּי אֶסְלַח לָאִשָּׁר אֲשָׁאֵר.

*There will come a time when the
aveiros of Klal Yisrael will be searched
for, but they will not be found.*

The Apter Rav asked a simple question. Why would anyone be searching for *aveiros*? We want to distance ourselves from them and cleanse ourselves of them. If they're gone, how can we fathom ever looking for them?

He explained with a *maschal*. Every *aveirah* is like a zero. Another *aveirah*, another zero. Zero after zero after zero. On their own, they amount to nothing. But when a person does teshuvah out of love, that teshuvah is like placing a

number in front of all those zeros. Suddenly, those same zeros become an enormous number.

Chazal tell us that through teshuvah *mei'ahavah*, חֶסֶד וְחַיִּים, the *aveiros* themselves can be transformed into *zechuyos*. So one day, a person may actually go searching for those old *aveiros*. Where are they? He wants them. Because what once pulled him down has now become part of what lifted him up.

That is the incredible power of teshuvah. It isn't only about erasing the past. It isn't only about somehow getting back to where we were before we fell. Teshuvah can take the fall itself and turn it into part of the climb.

With this, we can appreciate a beautiful *remez* quoted in the *sefer* פְּנִינֵי אוֹצֵר מהר"ץ, in the name of the חסידות, דף ערב חית. The *pasuk* at the end of Vayikra says (*Vayikra* 27:32):

וְכָל מַעֲשֵׂר בָקָר וְצֹאֵן כָּל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹר תַּחַת
הַשֶּׁבֶט הָעֹשִׂי יִהְיֶה קֹדֶשׁ לַה'.

**Source: R. Meilech Biderman*

Every tithe of cattle or flock, whatever passes under the staff, the tenth shall be holy to Hashem.

The מהר"ץ חיות sees in these words a *remez* to the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah.

כל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹר. Whatever happened. Whatever a person went through over the course of the year. Whatever *aveiros* he accumulated, whatever mistakes he made, however far he may have gone.

תַּחַת הַשֶּׁבֶט. He now places himself under the protection of these days, the first nine days of the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah. He begins turning around. He begins changing direction.

And then comes:

הַעֲשִׂירִי. The tenth day. Yom Kippur.

And what happens on that tenth day?

יְהִי קָדֹשׁ לָהּ.

He can become holy and pure, cleanse, once again.

The *pasuk* doesn't ignore the כל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹר. Whatever happened, happened. The year may have had its failures, its mistakes, its distance from Hashem.

But that does not have to determine where we end up.

We can take the כל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹר, turn around during the תַּחַת הַשֶּׁבֶט, and arrive at Yom Kippur, הַעֲשִׂירִי, ready to take the power of the day and become something changed. Or, more correctly, return to our true selves.



Ne'ilah: It's All a Gumball

A villager once came before a mighty king on the day when all petitions were heard. The palace was overflowing — nobles presented requests, generals submitted reports, merchants brought contracts, and scholars offered books of wisdom. The villager, holding a small crumpled page with his plea, felt his lips go dry. Surrounded by such grandeur, his voice nearly failed. How could his words matter here?

Then he noticed something remarkable: The king leaned down just as attentively to hear his request as he did to the commanders and nobles. The king made no distinction between the large and the

small; for to him, the needs of every subject were equally precious.

So too, as Yom Kippur wanes and Ne'ilah approaches, our mouths may feel numb and our lists long. We pray for life, happiness, health, and *parnasah*. We beg for *shidduchim*, for children, for *nachas*, for peace in our homes, and peace in the world. We ask for strength in learning, success in *avodas Hashem*, protection from illness, relief from worries, and clarity in a confusing world. We plead for atonement, for forgiveness, and for the coming of Mashiach.

And then we wonder: Are my words being processed? Is my *tefillah* too small,

too weak, too lost in the flood of prayers? At that moment, we must remind ourselves: Hashem is not a *melech basar vadam*. He is the משה קטן וגדול. Just as גדולתו אין חקר, so too His closeness knows no bounds. He is אין סוף — unlimited, boundless, beyond measure — and every word, every *tefillah*, every whisper from His children finds its way before Him.

Nothing is too big. And nothing gets lost in the cracks. He is our collective and individual Father in Heaven. And when we pray and come with our lists, Hashem doesn't even need them. He created us; He knows what we need. When we daven and cry and take these moments seriously, we are being *mevatel* ourselves — showing that we know who is in control, who can grant, who can save, who can deliver. That's all He needs from us.

Reb Mati Nadav related the following: Rabbi Simcha Bunim Berger, a *rav* in Monsey, recently went to Eretz Yisrael — not to tour, not to see the north or the south — just to get away, to tap back in, to live the simplicity of a Yerushalayim Yid for a week, to soak in the *kedushah* of the country. He rented a small apartment, learned a lot, went to yeshivos, and just breathed in Eretz Yisrael.

One of the real highlights of his trip, he told Rabbi Nadav, was a bris he attended. A friend of his had a baby in

Yerushalayim and invited him, and the sandek was Rav Tzvi Kushelevsky — the renowned Rosh Yeshiva who became a father for the first time at close to ninety years old. Rabbi Berger said there was an unusually powerful, almost electric feeling in the room, a sense of overwhelming gratitude and emotion — and then he explained why.

When this baby was born, he was completely silent. No cry. Nothing. The doctors said the situation was very bleak. “Usually, we can try something — operate, intervene somehow — but here, there's literally nothing we can do.” The parents were broken. The father called his Rosh Yeshiva and told him the situation. The Rosh Yeshiva gave a brachah, but the father, desperate, said, “Rebbi, I need a *havtachah* — a promise.”

“A promise?” said the Rosh Yeshiva, and after a pause he asked, “What are you willing to do to save this baby?”

“Anything,” the father replied.

“Anything?”

“Yes,” the father said.

The Rosh Yeshiva told him, “Then take upon yourself to learn one *kapitel* of Tehillim every day — with Rashi. Every day.”

The father said, “That's it? Just one?”

“Yes,” said the Rosh Yeshiva. “Just do that, and everything is going to be okay.”

*When we recognize that everything is from Him,
nothing is too big for Him to do — and nothing is too
small for us to do to show that we know it's all Him.*

The day after they came home from the hospital, the father sat down and learned that first *kapitel* with Rashi — and that very day, a miracle unfolded. The baby made a complete turnaround. The doctors could not believe it. Medicine had no explanation. The baby began breathing, and seven days later, the bris took place. That, Rabbi Berger said, is why the room was charged with such energy — because everyone knew this was a miracle baby.

To us, said Rabbi Nadav, this seems like such a huge miracle for something so small. No surgeries, no treatments, no endless medical bills — just a simple *kabbalah*. How can it be?

Rabbi Nadav explained with a *mashal*: Imagine a child crying bitter tears, moaning and groaning, his face wet from the steady flow of tears. The father, assuming something terrible has happened, rushes over and says, “What’s wrong? Why are you crying? What can I do to help?”

Through sobs, the child chokes out, “Tatty, I just want a gumball.”

“A gumball?” the father says. “That’s all you want? I can give you a gumball, I can give you a whole bag of gumballs, I can buy you a bike, I

can give you a hundred dollars!”

This, Rabbi Nadav said, is exactly how it is with us and Hashem. When we recognize that everything is from Him, nothing is too big for Him to do — and nothing is too small for us to do to show that we know it’s all Him. In the end, it’s all a gumball. One *kapitel* of Tehillim with Rashi may seem so small, almost trivial — yet it was enough to do what doctors, with all their skill and expertise, admitted they could not. When medicine had no answers, that single *kapitel* moved Heaven and brought life back into the child.

Because for Hashem, it’s not about quantity — it’s about quality. Not about the size of the act, but the heart behind it. It’s the relationship. It’s our submission to His *meluchah*.

As for now — during Ne’ilah, as the gates are closing — storm the heavens! Hashem is listening. Pour out your heart. Nothing is too big for Him. He is the *Kol Yachol* — He can do anything. Nothing is beyond His reach. To Hashem, there’s no difference between a gumball and life itself. Every *tefillah*, every cry, every plea is precious. Don’t hold back. Give it all you’ve got.

*Hashem is listening. Pour out your heart.
Nothing is too big for Him.*

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