



Teshuvah from love, not fear, the Yom Kippur Perspective 2019

Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement and the holiest day of the entire year. It is a day in which we are the most in touch with our essence and closest to G-d Almighty. It is a day that, during the time of the Beis Hamikdash, allowed the holiest person (the Kohen Gadol) to enter the most sacred place in the entirety of the world — the Kodesh HaKodashim, the holy of holies.

Yom Kippur is the day we are forgiven for all sins between man and G-d. As the Pasuk says (Vayikra 16:30), *“On this day He will forgive you, to purify you, that you shall be cleansed from all your sins before G-d.”* For nearly twenty-six hours, we will forgo most material pleasures in exchange for spiritual awakening and enlightenment.

We do not eat, drink, wear leather shoes, and spend most of our time in Shul praying. We attain an angel-like status in the hopes of complete forgiveness and absolution.

There is a famous question asked by many notable commentaries. Rosh Hashanah is not just the start of the new year but also the Day of Judgment. It is the time that G-d decides our fate for the upcoming year. On the other hand, Yom Kippur is a Day of Atonement and forgiveness. According to conventional thinking, wouldn't it be better to have Yom Kippur, a day of Atonement, before we are judged on Rosh Hashanah? First, we should be forgiven for our sins and start the new year with a clean slate! Why is the Day of Atonement after the Day of Judgment?

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, famously known as the lawyer of the Jewish people, gave an anecdote to answer this question.

Once, a mighty king took a hike in the forest to enjoy nature's beauty. Unfortunately, he eventually found himself lost and away from his royal entourage, without a single clue on how to return to his palace. After wandering around for several hours, he came upon some local villagers and told them, "I am your king! It is your duty to take me back to the royal palace!"

Instead of taking him seriously, they ignored him. They did not recognize him as the king and thought that he was a crazy and delusional man. Despite this, the king eventually found another traveler and asked if he could show him the way to the royal palace.

The traveler, who has seen the king on a few occasions before, grasped. The king himself was standing before him! He trembled in awe and immediately escorted the king the entire way back to the palace.

During their journey back, they engaged in deep discussions, and the king found the traveler to be very wise. When he returned to the royal palace, the king appointed him as his closest advisor and generously rewarded him for his rescue with extensive honor and wealth.

Many years passed, and the traveler-now-advisor once spoke disrespectfully towards the king. The king was infuriated and commanded that he was to be put to death. As his execution was about to take place, the advisor pleaded for one last request. "What is it?" the king asked. "I wish, your majesty," he answered, "that your advisor is allowed to wear the clothes that he wore when he first met the king in the forest."

The king agreed to this request. However, when he saw him dressed in those specific clothes, the king remembered the great kindness that this man had done for him when he was lost and alone in the forest. The king's compassion and mercy were aroused, and he acquitted the advisor of his crime and returned him to his royal position.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev explains that this story is our story on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. When we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, we remind G-d of the time that our forefather, Avraham Avinu, was willing to sacrifice

his only son for the sake of G-d. Like the advisor wearing the clothes he wore when he first met the king, we blow to shofar to arouse mercy from G-d.

We awaken the deep emotions of unconditional love, compassion, and mercy towards the Jewish people. When it comes to Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, G-d will show us his grace by forgiving our sins entirely.

However, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak continues, the clothing the advisor wears to arouse mercy is not just for the king but for himself. He wants to remind himself of the time that helped the king when no one else would, evoking the emotions of complete dedication and total loyalty to his king.

The same goes for the Jewish people; by blowing the shofar, we not only try to invoke mercy and compassion from G-d but also the emotions within ourselves of love and dedication for our Creator. When we repent for our sins out of pure love for G-d and not fear of punishment, we achieve the highest form of Teshuvah possible, and will certainly be forgiven.

The Fifth Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom Dovber (the Rebbe Rashab) explains the five steps of repentance using each letter of the word תשובה:

T: Tamim — Be sincere with G-d.

Sh: Shiviti — Place G-d before you at all times.

U: V'ahavta — Love your fellow as yourself.

V: B'chol — Look for G-d in all that you do.

H: Hatznei'a — Be humble before G-d.

The Rebbe Rashab explains that the best way to actualize Teshuvah is through davening. Yom Kippur has no shortage of meaningful and impactful prayers.

Although Yom Kippur is the most serious day of the year, there is an undertone of immense happiness. It is the joy of being immersed in spirituality and holiness and the confidence that G-d will accept our repentance, forgive our sins and seal us for a great and productive year!

May we all experience G-d's forgiveness & a year of health, happiness!
Have a meaningful Yom Kippur & an easy fast,
Rabbi Sholom Yemini