

The Secret of the Atonement of Yom-Hakippurim

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“Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi says: For all transgressions in the Torah, whether one repented or did not repent, Yom Kippur atones” (Yoma 85b)

According to Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi (Rebbi), Yom Ha-Kippurim atones for all sins in the Torah, both positive and negative, regardless of whether the sinner did Teshuva. Seemingly, even if a person sins and persists in his rebellious ways, all is forgiven by Yom Ha-Kippurim. Rebbi's method necessitates a profound study. How can one be atoned without any slight effort to repent his sins by doing Teshuva?

The Rambam (Hilchot Teshuva 1:3) and the Rema (Orach Chayim, 607:6) ruled that Yom Ha-Kippurim atones only for the sins of those who repent and believe that the day's atonement is effective. Nevertheless, the Rambam's language indicates that even he assumes that there is some merit in Yom Ha-kippurim itself, since he phrased: **“... and the day itself atones”**.

A possible answer may be found in a Midrash in Yoma 20a. The Midrash explains that the numerical value (Gematria) of the letters of the word 'Satan' is 364, therefore the Satan has the power to prevail at all those days except one day (Yom Ha-Kippurim) being thus exempt from Satan's influence. What is the inner meaning of this Midrash? The Gemara provides us with a vivid description of the Satan, as follows: **“Resh Lakish said: Satan, the evil prompter, and the Angel of Death are all one”** (Baba Batra 16b). As it seems from the Gemara, the 'Satan' is a general metaphor to all the evil forces that aim continuously to interfere with the Divine revelation here on earth.

On the very day that Hashem created the world, He established a balance between the different conflicting forces, between good forces and evil forces. In opposition to any positive and creative force in the world, stands a negative contradicting force that was also created by God. Respectively, Rav Charlap explains: **“Hashem, in his goodwill, has generated a disrupting force against His mere wish to reveal Himself”** (Rav Charlap, Mei Marom 9, Tetzave). These negative forces reveal themselves in different ways. When the world was created, the serpent represented these evil forces. At the time of Exodus, such negative forces revealed themselves as Amalek, and sometimes we witness negative forces as the Yetzer Hara or the Satan.

How, if so, can the humankind amend the world? If indeed there is a balance between good and evil, it will apparently be impossible to promote any positive change in the world, since **“Anyone who is greater than another, his evil inclination is greater than his”** (Sukkah 52a) - the more we promote the good in the world, the more the opposite evil will be promoted. How can we overcome these obstacles?

According to the works of Chassidut, there are three dimensions of disturbance in this world. Olam in Hebrew means “hidden”. Hashem is hidden in the world under curtains of space, time and human flesh. Every object in the world has a specific place by which that object is bounded. An object cannot appear in two different locations simultaneously, as opposed to Hashem, who is not confined by space and who's entity fills the entire world without any limitations or boundaries. Therefore, the limitation of space prevents us, human beings, from witnessing Hashem.

The dimension of time also conceals Hashem from us. Our world is limited to a time scale. For every creation, there is date of birth and date of expiration. Therefore, human beings who are limited in time, cannot witness Hashem's eternity. The third limitation rests within the human flesh. Our own earthly bodies prevent us from witnessing Hashem "...**for man cannot both have a visual perception of My essence and remain alive at the same time**" (Shemot 33:20).

Nevertheless, for each of these three limitations, Hashem created a loophole, by which one can overcome the interruptions and reveal Hashem in the world. There are places in the world in which it is easier to recognize the divine presence (Shechina): "**Anyone who resides in Eretz Yisrael is considered as one who has a God, and anyone who resides outside of Eretz Yisrael is considered as one who does not have a God**" (Ketubot 110b). In Eretz Yisrael, the limitation of space is not as heavy as elsewhere. In Yerushalayim, the city of Hashem, the limitation of space is hardly recognized: "**No man said to his fellow: 'There is no room for me to lodge in Jerusalem'**" (Pirkei Avot 5:5)

Our prayers in the place of Beit Hamikdash are more likely to be accepted – not because Hashem hears them better from that place, rather because we are better "receivers" of Shechina in this holy place. Therefore, it was never crowded in Beit Hamikdash, when Bnei Yisrael were bowing down: "**Though the worshipers stood pressed together, they could freely prostrate themselves**" (Ibid) The ultimate divine place was Kodesh Kodashim, where no space limitation existed. The Midrash (Yoma 21a) tells us that the size of Aron Hakodesh was bigger than the size of Kodesh Kodashim however it miraculously fit in.

Similarly, there are times in which it is easier to reveal Hashem. The premiere time is Shabbat. Upon the entrance of Shabbat, the time barriers are removed, the balance between good and evil is disrupted, and the spiritual forces maintain their strength in what is called - "**Neshama Yeterah**". The pinnacle of such times is Yom Kippur, a day on which there is no disruption to the revelation of Hashem, as Rabbi Raanan (grandson of Rav A.I. Kook) stated: "**On Yom Kippur, conceptions are not limited, the Satan does not control them, there is no doubt or confusion, the soul expands and it's conceptions [of G-d] increase without any constriction**" (BeShemen Raanan 1:215). On Yom Kippur we are not dominated by Yetzer Hara, but rather are considered to have the virtues of the angels.

Also, in humanity, there are different spiritual levels of individuals and collectives. The uniqueness of Am Yisrael is the potential to reveal Hashem in the world. Even within Am Yisrael there are different spiritual capabilities. Some people are less hidden from Hashem than others, and the person who has the least limitations and the greatest capacity of witnessing Hashem is HaCohen HaGadol. The peak of Yom Kippur was the time when the most spiritual human being – the High Priest - entered the most revealing place – Kodesh HaKodashim at a time of no Satan and disruption – Yom Kippur. This triple confluence would provide Am Yisrael with the most significant revelation throughout the year.

The revealing of Hashem, which is easily accessible on Yom Kippur is, in fact, the power of this Holy Day. Our natural desire for repentance is usually explained by our fear of the expected punishments for sins. But this conception is basically shallow, as Rav Charlap explains: "**However horrible are the punishments for every sin ... still there is no comparison to the severe punishment resulted from the fact that the sin drags another sin, since there is nothing else worse to the soul as the mere separation from Hashem, caused by the chain of sins**". (Rav Charlap, Ori Ve-Ishi). The most severe punishment resulting from sin is that which involves the separation from holiness. Accordingly, HaRav Soloveitchik explains the expression: "Chatanu LeFanecha" – we have sinned before you: "**A sin means separation from Hashem. I was before you (Hashem), and here came the sin and made**

me drift apart, and I have lost the feeling of being before you. The whole meaning of the concept of Teshuva is to miss, to long and strive to return standing before Hashem” (On Repentance, Rav Soloveitchik). True repentance means restoring the feelings of closeness to Hashem.

The climax of Yom Kippur is the time of Neila, as Rav Charlap says: **“The secret of the sealing on Neila, is that the heavenly gates are opened, and whoever manages to enter the open gates shall maintain the level of these elevated gates throughout the year.”**(Rav Charlap ,ibid)

The heavenly revelation that purifies us on this day, obliges us to break the ice of apathy. Hashem purifies us but expects us to cooperate. **“Rabbi Akiva said: Fortunate are you, O Israel! Before Whom are you cleansed, and Who cleanses you? Your Father in Heaven cleanses you”** (Yoma 88).

Hashem prepares the purifying waters of the Mikveh – **“Mikveh Israel – Hashem”** (Jeremiah 17:13). All we have to do is jump in and immerse in that holy experience. Let us not miss out on this unique opportunity, as explains Rav Charlap: **“If even at times in which Hashem reveals himself to us and grants us his love, if even then we behave stubbornly and ignore all of that, then the more mercy and love granted to us by Hashem, the more horrible Hashem’s grace is, and if we refuse to appreciate the grace, we will be accused of doing so. And from all around we are being yelled at – even on such spectacular times do you seal your ears and block your hearts?”** (Rav Charlap, Mei Marom 10)

On this holy day we have to daven with tears, not just tears of pain rather mainly tears of joy, real joy upon our reunion with Hashem. As the holy ARI stated, whoever sheds tears during the prayers of the high-holidays is guaranteed for **“Chatima Tova”**.

Amen Ken Yehi Ratzon!