



Yom Kippur



English version

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## KEEPING TO YOUR SCRIPT

One of the biggest problems facing the Orthodox is not being able to feel closeness with G-d. “Rabbi, I want to feel the Yomim Tovim more, I want my Shabbat table to be more spiritual, I want my prayers to have more fire in them...”

We are talking about good, Orthodox Jews who are trying. People who really *are* close to G-d, who really *are* trying to be good Jews, but not *feeling* closeness, not feeling connected. It seems that feeling closer is obviously much deeper than doing something different. It seems to be more about *being* something different.

I would like to look at our role of serving G-d from a fresh perspective. I will call it “the Yom Kippur perspective”. There is a mitzvah to do teshuva every day of the year. What is special about the Teshuva of the Yomim Noraim, of the High Holidays?

The Teshuva that is to be made in these days is not just about what you have done. But about who you have become, and all that is a result. Yom Kippur is about doing Teshuva because you are not doing your Tafkid.

In the Viduy of Yom Kippur, we say something interesting. עד שלא נוצרתי איני כדאי. *Before I was born, I had no worth.* What? We are saying Viduy for how we were before our birth? What could we have possibly done wrong before we were born?

Before I was born, for almost 6000 years, my soul was waiting for this generation to be sent down by G-d. To be born into *my* family, with *my* parents

and *my* siblings, into *my* community, and to be created the exact time I was created. At the precise, predetermined second. Your Neshama was destined to enter the world in exactly the minute it came, to exactly the parents you have and into the story that is specifically yours. *Before I was born, I wasn't ready to be born, for my destiny had not yet begun.*

And this is what we say Viduy about. ועכשיו שנוצרתי כאילו לא נוצרתי. *And now that I have been born, it is as if I had not been born.* I was not worthy of being created by G-d until now, because before, I was not able to fulfill my tafkid. I could not bring G-dliness to the world, in my unique way, until today. And now that I have been created, I am looking around at everyone else, copying others' ways of serving G-d, trying to be everyone else except myself! I waited so long to get on my unique stage for G-dliness, and I forgot the script!!! *And now that I have been created, it is as if I have not been created.*

This is the message of the story of Yonah, in its metaphoric version. (Vilna Gaon; Mishna Berurah 622 Sh. Tzi. 6) Each Jew comes down for a purpose; each soul is here on a mission. And sometimes, we try to run away from what we are supposed to be doing. And, when one runs away, G-d keeps sending the person back until the Tafkid is done.

How do we know what our soul's mission is about? The Arizal taught his students that those things that you are having difficulty with are the reason you



are here. And your Tefila is for those things that you are needed for. We need to dedicate our lives to where we are needed most. We need to dedicate our energies to those areas in which we can make our unique contribution.

Sometimes, your "lot" is to be a "holy being", something like the goat that is brought as a Korban for Hashem. And sometimes, your lot is to be like the "LaAzazel" goat. To bring out G-dliness in what does not appear to be a G-dly way. I will explain.

Yom Kippur is the day that is like Purim. Purim is about Esther: a righteous woman who needed to be in the most impure places. To defile herself. That was her mission. That was what she was needed for, in order to save the Jewish Nation. And that is what her Rabbi told her to do. Purim is about Mordechai, a great Torah Scholar, one of the Gedolei Hador, from the head of Sanhedrin, who needed to sacrifice his high level of learning in order to save Klal Yisrael. Esther and Mordechai are the ultimate example of living your Tefila. And sometimes in life, you think that you are being a tzaddik, but by not living up to your soul's purpose, you can be this "passive-aggressive Haman". עד דלא ידע בין ארור המן לברוך מרדכי.

Rabbi YY Rubinstein said, in the name of his Rebbi, something very powerful. We know that Reuven saved Yosef from his brothers, by putting him in the pit. Then, the brothers sat down to eat lunch, and during lunch, Shimon and Levi decided to kill Yosef. Yehuda saved Yosef by selling him. Reuven came back to the pit, and Yosef was gone. Reuven tore his clothes, and asked his brothers what they had done. *And, now, how was he to face his father?*

Rashi asks, where was Reuven at the time of the sale? Why did he disappear, when his brothers sat down for lunch? Because Reuven went to do his fasting, to clothe himself in sackcloth and ashes, for his hasty act of moving his father's bed next to his mother, Leah's, so many years earlier. He was doing his holy thing.

*But, Reuven! You could have saved us all from 210 years of slavery in Egypt, had you just stayed there at the pit and watched over your brother! Had you*

*not been busy doing Teshuva, but instead, had kept your eyes on your brother in the pit, you could have gotten forgiveness for your mistake from your father, just by being responsible and saving your brother Yosef's life!!* How many times do we not notice our "brother in the pit", because we are too busy with our own lofty levels of spirituality?

What do Reuven and the brothers have to do with Yom Kippur? EVERYTHING! What are the words in Yom Kippur Mahzor, immediately before the words mentioned about the fact that we are not doing our Tefila? כי אתה סולחן לישראל ומוחלן לשבטי ישראל For You are the One who forgives Yisrael, and You forgive the Tribes! Why are we mentioning the Tribes on Yom Kippur? Because we bring the sacrifice of a goat to remind us that the reason why we suffer so much is for not taking responsibility for each other and atone for that sin. The Tribes dipped Yosef's striped coat in goat's blood and brought it to their father Yaakov.

How can a person who is being so frum, so holy, be like a Haman? Well, I can't think of something as aggressive as a Haman. But I can think of what would have happened if Esther had stayed away from Achashverosh. She could have let Haman do what he wanted to do. Because she was being holy. And the same could have happened if Mordechai would not stop his high level of continuous Torah study to guide Esther and take control of the situation.

So, how do we feel close to G-d? The Baal Shem Tov would say that if you want to speak to G-d, speak to the person who you have a hard time being nice to. Because G-d is right over his shoulder. שריתי יקוק לנגדי תמיד *I will place Hashem opposite me always.* The word לנגדי, the BSHT would say, is referring to the one opposite me, *my opposition.* But I would like to change that a drop, in line with the Arizal's way of discovering our Tefila. *G-d is there wherever you have opposition in life.* To fix the Middah that is hardest for you to fix. Jealousy. Self Centeredness. Lust. Anger. Our soul was sent to this world to fix that Middah that is hardest to fix, and if we do not, the Middah takes over our life. The Shofar is the acronym of the words שורש פורה ראש ולענה. The root of bad that is inside each and every one of us that if we do not

uproot it it only gets worse. The Shofar blast is meant to wake us up and have us notice what we need to correct. No matter how many years we have been working on it, that is what we are here for. That is our Tefkid.

When you experience or encounter a difficulty in life, G-d is so close. He gave you that Tefkid. When you are facing a seemingly insurmountable difficulty, that is what G-d put us here for. Until

#### THE SECRET INGREDIENT TO TRULY FORGIVE

On our way back from Tashlich, a yeshiva student approached me with a touchy subject. I asked him if he believes in this Tashlich thing, that you can get rid of sin, do Teshuvah and become a new person. He said he did not believe that G-d lets us just throw away our sins, especially if there are high stakes that the sins might be repeated. "I am not going to really change anyway. I am the same guy as last year and two years ago, and I know that there will be another Yom Kippur that I will have to change again anyway. So, why should I invest my efforts into something that will fail, to begin with?"

I asked him, "What would happen if you tried a bit harder to learn, to pray, to be a better you... What would happen then?" His answer was, "It's nice. But then, sometime soon, when I catch myself doing what I am not supposed to do, seeing what I am not supposed to see, *then I view myself as if all the good that I did was all a fake!* Why should I aspire to spiritual greatness, put my mind and heart towards that when I am, anyway, a *spiritual shrimp?*" "Good question.

And this is how I responded. The main theme in the Amidah of Mussaf Rosh Hashana is Malchuyot, Zichronot and Shofarot. Zichronot are about how G-d reminds Himself of actions or situations that caused Him to be merciful, and put into action His attribute of mercy. The first on the list is how G-d remembered Noah in the Ark and saved him. This year, I bought a new R. H. Machzor, and what it said in the footnote brought me to tears... "Even though we do not have deeds that make us deserving of being remembered for the good in judgment, when we measure these deeds against ourselves, (- for most of our good

you accept the fact that if you have no options, if you have difficulty, that is your Tefkid, the mission of your soul, until you humble yourself to the array of options that G-d puts in front of you, YOU WILL NEVER FEEL CLOSE. You might be very close to G-d, but you will not feel it, until you accept that your whole circumstance is part of your mission. And it is from that situation that G-d wants you to connect.

actions are tainted with emptiness -) even so, compared to others that are on yet a lower level than ours, we are worthy of Your love and compassion. For, just as You remembered Noah with love when You judged him, Your love to him was not determined by the greatness of Noah's acts ( as R Yochanan said, Noah lacked Emunah. He lacked faith in G-d and did not enter the Ark until the water reached his ankles, for he did not believe that there would really be a flood). Still, You remembered Noah with love, *when You compared him to the people of his generation.* נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדרתו

There are endless perspectives from which G-d can view us in judgment. By and large, the way we judge ourselves, the way we judge others, is in accordance with our expectations of them and our view of how they are supposed to act. Who says our expectations are realistic, and that this is the way G-d sees things? Who says that someone who tries and fails is a *spiritual shrimp*, or a *faker?*

I asked the yeshiva student, "What is the first name of the most serious, most studious boy in Yeshiva? You know, the one who prays and learns with fire?" "Shimon", he replied. "And if you caught Shimon when he was overtaken by his temptations, looking where he is not supposed to, or not living up to his standards, what would your opinion of him be?" "Shimon is one big faker!" was his quick reply.

Why do we judge Shimon like that? Why is Shimon, who learns the whole day with fire, prays with fire most of the time, considered the fake Shimon, while the Shimon that we caught when his Yetzer Harah caught him, is the real Shimon? Maybe it is the other way around!!! Maybe Shimon

who was caught by his Yetzer Hara was the fake Shimon, the Shimon who is *faking it*, while the real Shimon is the one we know in the Study Hall!!

This is the core element of all forgiveness. The art of reframing. Reframing the context. "In light of ...," things are different. This is how we can forgive ourselves and others, and this is how G-d forgives us. G-d does not just let things go. That is not what forgiveness is about. Forgiveness is powered by G-d's Mercy, Rachamim. The root of the word Rachamim is Rechem, a womb. A womb makes place within itself for something else, even though there is, ostensibly, no more room. Rachamim is making room for another perspective. Looking at yourself, at others, in a way that will give room for justification.

The all-time master of reframing perspectives was R' Levi Yitzhak from Berdichev, who would always find a way to judge a Jew in the most positive light, even the greatest sinner. His Hassid noticed that when he was invited to attend a Brit Milah, his Rebbe always asked, if there would be a proper Seudah. Otherwise, he did not attend. The Hassid asked R' Levi Yitzhak why he wanted to make sure that a proper Seuda had been planned.

"My greatest defense for the sinners of the Jewish Nation to the prosecuting angels is the Seudah of a Mitzvah. Even the greatest sinner in Klal Yisrael does not throw a party when he "sins big". Most sins are committed in private. But for a Mitzvah, we make a Seudah, we make a whole *ta-ra-rum*. This merit cries out to the Heavens that we are happy to perform mitzvot, and we are not happy about our sins! A proper Seudat Mitzvah is prime time for presenting this claim to the Heavens!!"

It is hard to forgive others, even though it is something we all want to do before Yom Kippur. And it is even harder for us to forgive ourselves. But, if you cannot respect others for the good things they do, finding a perspective from which you can forgive them, you will continue on for another year holding the same emotional pain in your heart. And, if you can't respect *yourself* for

the "little spiritual things" you do, like wearing a Yarmulke, then you can never believe that you are worthy of investing energy in your spiritual goals.

The fact that G-d never forgets even the smallest good thing you do, no matter how much bad you have done, is something we learn from Maftir Yonah. Yonah did everything he could - he even "ran away from G-d", just so that he would not have to prophesy to the people of Ninveh, who would end up doing Teshuvah. Because Yonah felt that if the non Jews of Ninveh did Teshuvah, while the Jews who received a prophetic warning to repent, didn't, it would be a kitrug, a prosecuting claim against the Jews. But G-d did not allow Yonah to evade his responsibility.

The Midrash asks why Ninveh, out of all the gentile nations, deserved this VIP message from G-d, before G-d proceeded to annihilate them. Other nations did not get this "warning" before G-d brought his wrath on them. If they were sinners, G-d would wipe them off the face of the earth, like any other city of sinners before them or after them. Why did G-d give Ninveh another chance and force a Jewish prophet to go out of his way, and out of Israel, to warn them?

The Midrash Aggadah answers the question. Ninveh was the son of Ashur. Ashur lived in the time of Nimrod, in the time when Nimrod, king of the world, rebelled against G-d by building a big city, Babylon, with a big tower, to fight against G-d. But Ashur ran away and built a city for his son, Ninveh. And because he acted this way, and did not want to take part of the anti-G-d project, when Ninveh sinned, many, many, years later, G-d told Yonah to go and prophesy to them, and give them a last chance. G-d said, Your forefather went out of his land in My honor; that is why my prophet, Yonah, will need to go out of his land to give you a last chance.

No good deed is ever forgotten by G-d.

Wishing each and every Jew, a Gmar Hatimah Tovah.

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