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בס"ד



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## TORAH STUDY: AN ABSOLUTE PREREQUISITE FOR ATONEMENT

**T**he Rambam writes, "The very aspect of Yom Kippur atones for penitents, for it is written: 'For on this day he shall make atonement for you' [Vayikra 16:30]" (Hilchot Teshuvah 1:3). This requires an explanation, for if the text had actually said, "For this day atones," we would understand that it is Yom Kippur itself which atones for sin. Yet because it actually states, "For on this day he shall make atonement for you," this indicates that the Holy One, blessed be He, forgives those who repent on Yom Kippur. Therefore how can it be said that the day itself procures atonement? Furthermore, we have to explain the meaning of the expression: "For on this day he shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you from all your sins. Before Hashem you shall be clean." Since the verse states, "For on this day he shall make atonement for you" before stating, "Before Hashem you shall be clean," we understand that Hashem atones for the Children of Israel before they repent and are cleansed. It seems that the verse should have stated, "For before Hashem you shall be clean, and on this day he shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you from all your sins"!

### *The Study of Torah is Essential for Repentance*

We may explain this according to the verse, "Return, O Israel, towards Hashem your G-d, for you have stumbled in your iniquity. Take words with you and return to Hashem" (Hosea 14:2-3). Why does the verse first say "towards Hashem," but then says "to Hashem"? We also need to understand what the prophet means by saying, "Take words with you." What exactly are the words that we must take?

The Sages have said (Sifrei, Devarim 306) that these "words" are words of Torah, as it is written: "These words Hashem spoke to your entire assembly" (Devarim 5:19). This verse is saying that although a person may repent of his evil deeds, he still has not performed teshuvah worthy of the name if he has not started to learn Torah without going back to his sins. One without the other is impossible. In fact if a person studies Torah without repenting of his sins, he will die without repenting. Yet if he repents of his sins without studying Torah, he will eventually return to his sins. This is because there is nothing more powerful in the fight against sin than words of Torah.

This is why the prophet examines what the mitzvah of teshuvah consists of. At first the sinner must stop sinning and mourn over his sins. This is what constitutes, "Return, O Israel, towards Hashem" – towards Him without having

actually reached Him. This is not complete teshuvah. When does a person perform teshuvah that is considered complete? It is when he "take[s] words" with him, these being words of Torah. At that point he returns to Hashem, for the fact that he studies Torah constitutes an assurance that he will not return to his sins, since the Torah is a shield against the evil inclination. Furthermore, King David said: "Turn from evil and do good" (Tehillim 34:15) – first turn away from evil, and then do good.

Let us say that the essence of teshuvah consists of Torah study. In fact a person who repents but does not study Torah may transgress many serious prohibitions of which he is unaware, since he never studied them. Hence after doing teshuvah, a person must immediately start learning Torah in order to know what is permitted and forbidden. In regards to this subject, we read in the Shulchan Aruch: "Those who are vigilant begin...as soon as Yom Kippur ends, in order to proceed from one mitzvah to another" (Rema, Orach Chaim 624:5). Since we have repented and regretted our sins on Yom Kippur, we immediately go and study Torah and fulfill mitzvot in order to sin no more.

Hence it is not written, "For this day atones," but rather: "For on this day he shall make atonement for you." We may have thought that since Yom Kippur itself procures atonement, a person's repentance will be accepted even if he does not study Torah after Yom Kippur. However the verse states, "For on this day he shall make atonement for you" – the day atones for one who seeks atonement, but it does not atone for one who does not seek atonement. If it had said, "For this day atones," we would have thought that the day itself atones even if a person has not resolved to do anything. It is therefore written, "For on this day he shall make atonement for you," i.e., for one who seeks atonement.

### *Atonement Erases Sins*

One may object to this by noting that our Sages state, "Rabbi said: 'For all transgressions of the Torah, whether he repented or not, Yom Kippur brings atonement'" (Shevuot 13a). The answer is that teshuvah is one thing, while atonement is another. Teshuvah consists of the sinner repenting of his sins, whereas atonement consists of Hashem erasing his misdeeds, rendering them non-existent. Rashi explains, "I am of the opinion that whenever the word kaparah is used in association with iniquity and sin...it always signifies erasing and removing. It is an Aramaic expression occurring frequently in the Talmud.... In Biblical Hebrew as well, the bowls of the Sanctuary are called kippurei zahav [Ezra

1:10] because the kohen wiped his hands on them" (Rashi on Bereshith 32:21).

We must first realize that the Holy One, blessed be He, neither atones nor erases sin unless a person himself focuses on erasing it. When Yom Kippur has passed and a person begins to study Torah, perform mitzvot, and separate himself from sin, this clearly indicates that he actually wants to erase all the sins he committed up to that time, at which point Hashem will also erase them.

### *Teshuvah that is Not Serious*

This is why it is written, "For on this day he shall make atonement for you." It does not say that the day itself procures atonement, because the Torah is teaching us something else: On this day, reflect upon the fact that the Holy One, blessed be He, will forgive you tomorrow when you study Torah and abandon sin. If you conduct yourself in this way, the Holy One, blessed be He, will fulfill what is written in the Torah: "to cleanse you from all your sins. Before Hashem you shall be clean." This cannot happen, however, unless a person abandons sin and studies Torah. If he is content on simply repenting, his teshuvah will not be considered serious unless he begins to carry out what he committed himself to doing on the day after Yom Kippur. In fact the masters of Mussar say that Yom Kippur does not begin until after Yom Kippur, and by this they mean what we, with G-d's help, have explained above.



*The Pinto Centers around the world and Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita send you their best wishes for the upcoming year. May you have a joyous Shana Tova 5768, and may we all be inscribed in the Book of Life. Amen.*

# THE WORDS OF THE SAGES

## DO NOT COMPLAIN AGAINST G-D'S WAYS!

*It is written, "The Rock – perfect is His work, for all His ways are just. A G-d of faith without iniquity, righteous and fair is He" (Devarim 32:4).*

In life we sometimes see things that are surprising, such as a tzaddik asking for bread to satisfy his hunger and a garment to clothe himself. In such cases the question arises: Does Hashem not have ways of providing him with what he needs without him having to ask?

The Chafetz Chaim writes that this is like a rich man whose only son is struck by a disease which the doctors fear they cannot cure, until finally a great physician comes along and heals him. He warns the rich man to make sure that his only son never eats any fatty meat, for his life depends on it.

One day the rich man must attend to a business matter in another town, and he tells his wife to ensure that the physician's warning is respected. When the man's wife sits down to eat lunch, the smell of meat enters her son's nostrils, and he immediately approaches the table and gobbles up a piece of fatty meat, and then he leaves.

Naturally, the boy falls ill once again, and when the rich man returns from his journey, he finds the boy hovering between life and death. He then runs to get the physician and begs him to save his only son, vowing over and over to never leave on another business trip, and to always watch over his son himself.

After great efforts, the physician manages to save the boy's life. When the rich man hosts a meal of thanksgiving for the family, he takes his son out of the great dining room in which all the guests are seated around the table, a table filled with all kinds of delicious foods. The guests, seeing what is happening, ask why this "cruel" father is acting so strangely, paying no heed to his son's supplications to sit down at the guest table. Only the rich man knows why he is doing this.

The same applies to the way in which Hashem directs the world. Sometimes he chases a tzaddik out of the dining room for his own good. Although we do not understand what is happening, we believe with all our heart that it is for his own good. In fact Hashem is just and upright. He knows that poverty befits the Children of Israel, and we must not complain against His ways.

### **It Couldn't Hurt if Things Were Better**

It is said that one of the Chafetz Chaim's students married the daughter of a wealthy merchant. This avrech became involved in the thriving business of his father-in-law, but was unsuccessful despite his great intelligence. In fact most of his father-in-law's money was lost due to his business failures.

One day this avrech went to find his great rebbe, presenting himself as a former student at the Radin yeshiva. The Chafetz Chaim asked him, "How are things with you now?" The avrech replied with a hint of anger, "It couldn't hurt if things were better!"

"How do you know that 'it couldn't hurt'?" asked the Chafetz Chaim in a tone of slight rebuke. After a short pause, he added: "In His holy Torah, Hashem has taught us when and how to help others. There is therefore no doubt that the Creator knows better than you about what is good for you. Since He does not improve your financial situation, it means that this is what's best for you and your family. Have we not learned from Moshe in the song in which he departed from the Children

of Israel: 'The Rock – perfect is His work, for all His ways are just. A G-d of faith without iniquity, righteous and fair is He'? Our Sages have also taught a Halachah for all the generations: 'It is incumbent on a man to bless [G-d] for the evil in the same way as for the good' [Berachot 54a], for everything done by the Holy One, blessed be He, is for the good."

### **The Difference Between Poor and Rich**

There was a certain lumber merchant who sent a large shipment of heating wood to Lithuania and eastern Prussia. Yet to his great dismay, Prussian authorities held his shipment at the border for several days, and eventually returned it to him.

This wealthy merchant was greatly affected by the financial loss, for he had believed that the sale was rock solid. Since he was close to Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin Zatzal, he quickly went to find the gaon in order to recount this sad event and the distress it was causing him.

Rabbi Chaim patiently listened to his story, and in the end he consoled him with warm and encouraging words. Among other things, Rabbi Chaim said to him: "The Creator has many ways of bringing a person out of darkness and into the light, and King David has taught us: 'Hope in Hashem. Strengthen yourself and He will give you courage, and hope in Hashem' [Tehillim 27:14]."

Some time later, the price of wood greatly increased, and this merchant earned thousands of rubles with the same shipment of wood that had been returned to him from the Prussian border. The merchant returned to Rabbi Chaim and said, "I want to thank you for your encouraging words when I was in distress. Today I clearly see the Creator's hand in all of this!"

When Rabbi Chaim heard these words, he smiled and said to him: "You see the difference between poor and rich? It resides in the awareness of Divine Providence! A poor person works hard to earn a living, and in his flesh he senses G-d's guiding hand each day. During times of great poverty, he entrusts himself completely in Hashem and knows that 'all His ways are just.' As for the rich, who have benefited from this world and all that it generously offers, they only sense Divine Providence in certain situations, situations that occur only once every few years."

## GUARD YOUR TONGUE

### **Still Forbidden**

Even if a statement consists of something that most people pay little attention to, and the person in question is not very embarrassed by it (such as, for example, recounting that a person does not want to study Torah, or that something he said is a lie, or things of that nature), it is still forbidden to recount. This is because, in any case, it implies that he does not observe Torah. Even speaking about him in regards to the area of mitzvot (for example, by saying that he is stingy with his money and does not spend what is necessary for Shabbat, which is among the positive mitzvot to remember Shabbat) is also forbidden.

– Chafetz Chaim

# AT THE SOURCE

## A Time to be Silent

*It is written, "Ask your father, and he will tell you; your elders, and they will inform you" (Devarim 32:7).*

In Sefer Chassidim, Rabbi Yehudah HaChassid explains this verse as follows:

"Ask your father, and he will tell you" – and if you know that he will be unable to answer, then ask "your elders, and they will inform you." The verse is teaching us that if a student asks his Rav a question that he cannot answer, the student should not ask another Torah scholar the same question in the presence of his Rav, lest he embarrass him.

Along the same lines, Rabbi Eliezer Papo Zatzal writes in Ya'alzu Chasidim: "One must not ask his Rav many questions if he sees that he does not know how to answer them, especially in front of a third party. In this way a scholar will hear and be afraid of embarrassing his Rav or other people. The Zohar recounts that in Heaven, a person was punished for embarrassing his teachers with his questions. In this regard it is said, 'There is a time to be silent' [Kohelet 3:7]."

## Capital Punishment

*It is written, "Wasted by hunger and devoured by burning heat and bitter destruction. I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the venom of creeping things" (Devarim 32:24).*

The author of Panim Yafot, Rabbi Pinchas Halevi Horowitz, finds an allusion in this verse to a statement of the Sages: "The judgment of the four forms of capital punishment has not ceased" (Ketubot 30b).

"Wasted by hunger" – an allusion to death by strangulation. Thus it is written, "He who would have been sentenced to strangulation...dies from croup [Rashi]" (Ketubot 30b).

"Devoured by burning heat" – an allusion to death by the sword, as the Gemara states: "He who would have been sentenced to decapitation... robbers come upon him" (ibid.).

"I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them" – it is said that those who deserve to be stoned are torn apart by wild beasts (ibid.).

"The venom of creeping things" – as it is written: "He who would have been sentenced to burning...a serpent bites him" (ibid.).

## Hashem Heals

*It is written, "I kill and bring life; I wound and I heal" (Devarim 32:39).*

In his book Torah VaHaim, Rabbi Yehoshua Shimon Haim Ovadia Zatzal asks why, in regards to healing, the verse underlines that Hashem is the One Who heals ("I wound and I heal"), yet in regards to death it simply states: "I kill and bring life."

He answers by saying that one who wounds his fellowman must ensure that he is healed. If he is a doctor, he must personally heal him, for the injured person may say: "You are in my eyes like a lurking lion" (see Bava Kama 35a).

Yet with regards to the Holy One, blessed be He – the One Who wounds and the One Who heals – He wounds man for his own good, in order to redeem his sins. The One Who wounds can heal man Himself, and when a person repents of his evil ways, he will be healed.

## None Beside Him

*It is written, "See now that I, I am He, and there is no god with Me. I kill and bring life; I wound and I heal. There is none who can rescue from My hand" (Devarim 32:39).*

In his book Kli Yakar, Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Zatzal of Prague states

that the double expression ani ani ("I, I") is meant to answer those who think that there are two divinities, one good and the other evil. Hanna said, "Do not abound in speaking with gevoha gevoha [arrogance upon arrogance]" (I Samuel 2:3), meaning that there are two ways of being arrogant, represented by: "Hashem impoverishes and makes rich. He lowers to the grave and raises up" (v.7). In fact Hashem is responsible for both extremes.

Rabbi Moshe Mekutzi, at the beginning of his commentary on the positive mitzvot, cites Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon in responding to those who say that there were two divinities: "If each of these two can do what he wants, and one of them wants a person to live while the other wants him to die, it will happen that this person will die, live, die again, and so on in the blink of an eye."

Therefore we read, "See now that I, I am He" – I control good and evil; "and there is no god with Me," the proof being that "I kill and bring life; I wound and I heal. There is none who can rescue from My hand." In other words: If there had been someone else, he could rescue from My hand, and a person would die, live, die, live, in the blink of an eye. From here we learn that "there is no god with Me."

# IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA

## Take Words With You

In the Haftarah for this Shabbat, we read the words of the prophet Hosea: "Return, O Israel, towards Hashem your G-d, for you have stumbled in your iniquity. Take words with you and return to Hashem" (Hosea 14:2-3). What exactly are the words that the prophet is suggesting the Children of Israel should take with them? He does not say or explain what a person must take, nor with what he should return to Hashem.

I thought that I would explain this by saying that the prophet is telling the Children of Israel not to ask questions about Divine Providence. For example, when a tragedy strikes someone, it is natural for doubts and questions to enter his mind: Why did this happen to me? For what reason am I suffering so much? He does not reflect upon the fact that his numerous sins are the cause, "for you have stumbled in your iniquity." Hence the prophet states, "Take words with you" – meaning that everyone must take with him the questions and words that he wants to say – and he must bear his pain without voicing them. He must completely repent before G-d and realize that everything which has happened to him occurred because he stumbled in sin.

Hence the prophet Hosea states, "Return, O Israel, towards Hashem your G-d" – which designates a person's last day on earth, when his soul returns to the place from which it came. At that point it once again cleaves to the light of the countenance of the King of life, for the soul of every Jew is a divine spark.

Until that day, a person must repent because "you have stumbled in your iniquity." He must associate the sufferings that have come upon him with his own sins, and he must not complain about Heaven. Instead, he must take the words that he wants to say and keep them to himself. He must not voice them aloud.

"Take words with you," the reason being to "return to Hashem," for everything is related to our sins. When Jews repent and fulfill, "Return, O Israel, towards Hashem your G-d," the Holy One, blessed be He, will also fulfill what is written: "Return, Hashem, until when? Relent concerning Your servants" (Tehillim 90:13). Hashem repents, so to speak, and takes pity on the Jewish people, forgiving their sins by the merit of teshuvah. Hence Shabbat this week is called Shabbat Shuvah, for both the Jewish people and Hashem, so to speak, do teshuvah. With the teshuvah of them both, the sins of the Jewish people are forgiven.



# WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

## *Saying “Amen” – Why Rabbi Mordechai Yaffe was Reprimanded*

*It is written, “When I call out the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our G-d” (Devarim 32:3).*

Here Rashi explains: “When I call out and make mention of Hashem’s Name, you shall ascribe greatness to our G-d and bless His name.” In the Shulchan Aruch we read, “One who hears a Jew say a blessing, even if it is not incumbent upon him to say the same blessing, must reply ‘Amen’” (Orach Chaim 215:2). It makes no difference if the one saying the blessing is an adult who must observe mitzvot, or a child who is not yet Bar Mitzvah, as we see in the following story, which is mentioned in some seforim.

Before the gaon Rabbi Mordechai Yaffe Zatzal (the author of Levushim) became the Rav of Pozna, he traveled to Venice and stayed with Rabbi Yitzchak Abuav the Sephardi Zatzal to study Torah with him for three months.

One day, while he was in the home of Rabbi Abuav, Rabbi Abuav’s little boy loudly recited the blessing Borei Pri Ha’etz over fruit, and the entire family replied “Amen.” The only one who remained silent was Rabbi Mordechai Yaffe, who was immersed in study at the time. Although he remained silent, he had no ill intentions.

Rabbi Abuav became very angry with him, to the point that he greatly embarrassed Rabbi Mordechai and chased him from his home!

Rabbi Mordechai waited 30 days, as a student must do when he is rejected by his teacher, and then returned to Rabbi Abuav and sought forgiveness. He asked him what sin he had committed, and why he had become so angry with him.

Rabbi Abuav replied, “I love you dearly and sincerely, but know that you merited death by the hands of Heaven when you did not reply ‘Amen’ in response to the child’s blessing. This estrangement was meant to atone for the great harm that was done by the fact that you did not say ‘Amen.’ I forgive you on condition that wherever you go, in every community that you find yourself in, you will describe the magnitude of this sin, and the evil caused by one who does not say ‘Amen’ in response to a blessing that he hears. You must also recount a terrible incident that I will not tell you in regards to this sin.”

### **An Actual Incident**

In Spain, before the expulsion of the great communities, there was a large city from which the king wanted to expel Jews several times. However there was a very pious and humble Av Beit Din in this city, a man who always pleased the king. Each time that the king would enact a harsh decree, this Rav was able to have it rescinded.

One day the king became angry with the Jews and ordered them expelled. The leading figures of the community went to find the Rav and asked him to go see the king and beg him to annul the evil decree that he had made against the Jews.

The Rav told him that he wanted to pray Mincha beforehand, for the beginning of wisdom is the fear of G-d. However the delegates from the community insisted that he leave right away, telling him: “It’s a great mitzvah to save the entire community, and this is the right time to go before the king. You can pray afterwards.”

The Rav allowed himself to be convinced, and so he immediately went to see the king.

When the king saw him, he was happy. He hurried to meet the Rav and warmly embraced him. The Rav was certain that he would be able to

annul the king’s decree this time as well, and so he began to speak about various things with him. As they were speaking, a priest arrived from the king’s distant realms, and he fell at the king’s feet and blessed him for a long time in a language that the Rav was unfamiliar with.

When the Rav saw that the priest had still not finished, and that the time for praying Mincha was quickly passing, he headed towards a corner and began to pray.

The Rav thought that he would have enough time to complete Mincha before the priest had finished speaking. Yet in the middle of the Rav’s prayer, the priest got up and ordered everyone in the royal house to answer ‘Amen’ to the blessing he had given to the king, so that it would be fulfilled. Hence everyone except the Rav said ‘Amen,’ for the Rav had not understood what the priest was saying, and furthermore he did not want to interrupt himself as he was praying.

The priest asked everyone in the royal house if they had responded ‘Amen’ to his blessing, and they said yes. The priest then asked if this Jew had also responded ‘Amen’ to his blessing, and he was told that he had not. When the priest heard this, he tore out his hair and let out a great cry, for his blessing would not be fulfilled because of this Jew.

When the king heard the priest’s remarks, he was enraged. His heart became cruel, and he immediately ordered his servants to kill the Rav by cutting him into pieces. This is precisely what they did, forcing him to die an atrocious and incredibly painful death. The king then ordered Jews to be expelled from his country.

In that same city there was another pious man, the friend of the Rav who had just been murdered. For the rest of his life, he tried to learn what had caused the king to become so angry with his friend, and why he had been murdered while being sent to fulfill the mitzvah of saving the Jewish community from an evil decree.

This man fasted, wept, and prayed in order for Heaven to teach him what sin the Rav had committed, such that he suffered such a horrific death.

He isolated himself in a special room, grieving over the death of the Rav, until one day the Rav himself appeared to him while he was still in isolation. His entire body shook when he saw the Rav, who said to him: “Do not fear!” His friend asked why Hashem had treated him in this way, and why such fury had been unleashed against him.

### **This is what he said:**

“Know that I never committed any sin. Once, however, when my son was a boy, he said a blessing over bread. I heard the blessing, but I did not respond ‘Amen.’ The Holy One, blessed be He, was patient until then. When I stood before a king of flesh and blood, and yet failed to respond to his blessing, the king was seized with great anger. At that point the Attribute of Justice rose up against me, for I had failed to respond ‘Amen’ to the blessing that my own son had uttered for the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He. Thus it was decreed that I should die a horrendous death.”

The deceased continued his account: “You shall tell this story to your son, and to your grandson, and to everyone, so they may pay attention to responding ‘Amen.’” He then disappeared.

When Rav Abuav finished telling this story to the gaon Rabbi Mordechai Yaffe, the author of Levushim, he instructed him to spread it in public and to proclaim it at least once a month. This was in order to teach everyone about the punishment of those who do not say ‘Amen’ in response to the blessing of a child, and even more so to the Shaliach Tzibur in synagogue when he recites Shemoneh Esrei and Kaddish.