TORAS AVIGDOR
AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE
RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

YOM KIPPUR
WITH
RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L
BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

REPENTANCE AND RECONCILIATION

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Part I. Desiring Kaparah

Out-of-Style Burial

In Mesichta Sanhedrin (46b), the Gemara talks about a man who leaves an order, his last will and testament, that they shouldn't bury him. He says, "לָא בָּעֵינָא דְּלִיקְבְּרוּהַ לְהָהוּא גַּבְרָא – *After I die, don't bother with burial. I'm not interested.*" And the question in the Gemara is: do we obey him or not?

And it's not an abstract question, by the way. I was speaking to a funeral director recently and he said that there's a big falling off in business because people are not interested in burial anymore. Pet cemeteries are on the increase, he said. When a pet cat dies, the house goes hysterical with mourning. They're "bunkered" by grief, he said. I don't know what that word means but it sounds terrible. And they plan out quite expensive funerals for the deceased furball.

Rejecting Burial

But he said that when it comes to human beings, some are just not interested in funerals. He was complaining to me because that's his livelihood. If he can persuade you to buy a big casket, something ornate, he can lean back and relax for a week or so. He made a lot of profit. But it's going out of style, he said. People don't want to bother with it; they want to have some easy solution. They don't even put it in a fancy marble urn like they used to do. A crematorium used to be a fancy hall with marble shelves and they put a marble urn and the name was on it — but that costs money, too, and so today they are companies like garbage disposal companies. And a lot of people contract during their lifetime that their remains should be disposed of in the cheapest possible manner. Upon request, they'll turn you into garbage quite quickly if that's what you want. They'll burn someone up into ashes and dump him in a river someplace. It's being done; people want that.

And so the question in the Gemara is what to do in such a case, if a Jew would make such a request before his death; he says, "Don't bury me."

So the Gemara says it depends on what the purpose of burial is. Everyone knows it's a mitzvah; you have to bury a *meis* in the earth. You can't cremate and you can't leave him in an above-ground burial; you have to put him into the earth. But the question is: why? What's the function of burial?

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Burial for Bizayon

So the Gemara offers two possibilities. Number one, maybe it's because it would be a *bizayon* otherwise. It's a disgrace when the body is allowed to remain above ground and it begins to decompose. For his family, his relatives, it's a humiliation that their own flesh and blood is being dishonored like that.

And so the Gemara says if that's the reason for burial — to protect the honor of this man's family — then we won't listen to him. Who cares what he wants? To listen to him and because of that disgrace his family? No; it's not his prerogative. And so we'll have to disobey his testament.

Burial for Atonement

But then the Gemara entertains a different reason for *kevurah*. Maybe the purpose of burial is not to prevent *bizayon*; maybe it's for *kaparah*, for atonement. Because when you put the body into the earth, so things start happening to the body; it starts disintegrating and of course there are worms, too, and all this is a *kaparah*.

You know, it's quite an ordeal to be buried. וְנַפְשׁוֹ עָלָיו תֶּאֱבָל – *The soul mourns for what's taking place* (Iyov 14:22; see Shabbos 13b). The soul loves the body; they're old pals from the beginning, and it hates it like anything to leave the body. It'll do anything to remain with the body. And finally, when it has to leave, it hovers around for some time, and when it sees what's happening to the body, it's cut to the quick. We have no idea how the soul is pained to see its old friend being chewed up by decay and bacteria. After all, the body is a picture representative of the soul and now it's being pierced by nematodes, by earthworms. It's a *rachmanus* on the soul that it has to witness that. And so it's a *kaparah*; it's an atonement for the man's sins.

Rejecting Kaparah

And so the Gemara says as follows: If the function of burial is for *kaparah* rather than avoiding *bizayon*, then we *do* follow his last will to not bury him. דְּאִי אָמַרְתְּ מִשּׁוּם כַּפָּרָה – *If you say burial is because of atonement*, הָא אָמַר לָא בָּעֵינָא כַּפָּרָה – *he said he does not want any atonement*. If it's an atonement for the man's sins and he says he doesn't want it, then you can listen to him and not bury him.

And Rashi explains, וְאִי נַמֵּי קָבְרֵי לֵיהּ – *because even if they would bury him*, לֹא מִתְכַּפֵּר – *it wouldn't help; he wouldn't get atonement anyhow*. Even though his body will disintegrate and the soul will suffer through that, he won't have the benefit of atonement.

Rejection Accepted

That's a remarkable statement in Rashi. Because he waived the opportunity and gave up the benefit of the atonement that burial means, so even if we bury him — we'll bury him anyhow; we'll disregard his request because it's a mitzvah for us to bury him — but it matters what he said because whatever we do, it won't help him a bit. There won't be any *kaparah*.

Now, that's a remarkable statement because the process is taking place anyhow — the body is dissolving into the soil; he has *chibut hakever* and the soul is suffering — so why shouldn't he be forgiven?

And so we learn here a very important principle: Atonement is something that you have to *want*. It's not something automatic, a process that you do and then you're forgiven — you have to *desire* it for it to function. And even someone who otherwise would be worthy of atonement, if he doesn't desire it, he's not going to get it.

Yom Kippur is Forever

Now, there's a big difference between yes atonement and not atonement. It's not only to stave off punishment in this world; it's the Next World, too. The difference could even be the loss of his *neshamah* — his soul could even go lost forever if he doesn't achieve atonement. That's why Yom Kippur is so important. What you can accomplish on this day is not merely for *chayei Olam Hazeh*. Even a man who doesn't care to live anymore — let's say

he's 119 years old and he was successful and he had everything from life that one could desire, so he doesn't care so much if he'll live another six months or twelve months. Still, he has to exert himself on Yom Kippur with all his heart no less than the man who wants to live another hundred years. Because his *eternal* life is at risk; it's a matter of eternal life or death *chalilah*, to get *kaparah*.

And we're learning now that it only functions if it's desired. All of your *teshuvah*, all of your *al cheits* and all of your *tefillos* will accomplish according to the degree to which you desire *Kaparah*.

Belief + Desire = Atonement

Of course, included in that is you must believe in it first. If a person doesn't believe that Yom Kippur is *mechaper*, then there's nothing to desire — he doesn't even believe that Yom Kippur can help him. And so it won't. In order for it to be effective a person has to believe that Yom Kippur is actually a cleansing, it's a *kaparah*, that it washes clean your soul of the stains. That's very important! You don't realize how very important it is to believe that Yom Kippur is *mechaper*.

By the way, if you haven't thought about it much, there's still time. Get busy from now until tomorrow night because the *kaparah* depends on being aware that there is a *kaparah*. You have to train yourself and prepare your mind that עֲצוּמוֹ שֶׁל יוֹם מְכַפֵּר – *the day itself is a cleansing* (see Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 1:3). As the minutes tick by, you are being cleansed of your sins. It's not enough to say, "Forgive me." It's a frame of mind — you are being laundered little by little; your sins go away from you on Yom Kippur. And you have to believe in it implicitly; otherwise it won't help.

But we're learning now that to believe is not enough. To be aware, to know it in a cold type of way, it's not enough. This fellow in the Gemara who said, "Don't bury me" — he believed. But he didn't *desire* it! הָא אָמַר לָא בָּעֵינָא כַּפָּרָה – "I don't want it," he said. You have to *desire* an atonement. You have to crave it, yearn for it. And the more you desire it the more you'll get it.

The Essential Element

So now we learn what's an essential attitude on Yom Kippur, or even any occasion of *teshuvah*. Of course, you'll have to mend your ways and pursue new paths in life. Sometimes you might even have to find a new job and new friends, too. Yom Kippur requires that we should spend that important day thinking about these things.

And therefore, while the *shatz* is repeating the Shemoneh Esrei and he's saying *piyutim*, so in between you have an opportunity to think for a few moments. You should utilize the minutes to consider the past and the future and in what ways you must alter your specific *derachim* or your general *derech* in life. You should consider everything because this is the time when it's most acceptable.

But that's not enough. The essential preface to all of that is to acquire the fundamental attitude of mind of earnestly desiring *kaparah*. That has to be our greatest goal on Yom Kippur: we want *kaparah*. And we want it with all our hearts!

That's why we spend so much time crying out for it; because the crying out, that's the proof that you want it. Nobody says weakly, "Please save my life." Oh no! You'll scream if you feel your life is in danger! And so it's important to call out for help on Yom Kippur. That shows you're interested, that you desire His mercy, His forgiveness. And Hakadosh Baruch Hu gauges that. Like it says, וְעוֹנֶה לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל – *when does He answer His people, Yisroel?* בְּעֵת שַׁוְּעָם אֵלָיו – *When they cry out to Him!* (Birchos Krias Shema). If you're shouting and crying, it means you're serious about it; you really want it.

The Yom Kippur Walk

That's why, as I always say, if you ever walk on Yom Kippur past a Reform Temple, or maybe even some of the Modern Orthodox places, it's nice and quiet inside. Everybody is relaxed. Nothing to cry

for. A few blocks later, you pass by Mirrer Yeshiva and everybody is shouting and weeping, knocking their heads against the wall. So you think it's a wicked place this Mirrer Yeshiva; they have a lot of sins to make up for.

It's just the opposite. The more stupid you are, the more uninterested you are in atonement. It's like walking by a stall where horses are parked. Horses are not weeping about anything. They haven't the slightest idea what's a sin — maybe killing somebody. And even that's not so terrible; the Supreme Court says it's not such a big sin to kill somebody. You go someplace for a little while. You get color TV, and they give you good meals and you get out after five or six years. Not so terrible. So what's a sin today? So therefore, to *amei ha'aretz* who live by habit, nothing is really a big sin. And so what do you have to cry about? Do I really need a *kaparah*?

Choosing a Loud Minyan

That's why I recommend *davening* in a shul where people mean it, where they yell and cry and weep. Because even if *you* don't cry and shout, if you're fortunate enough to *daven* among such Jews, you become impressed by that. You learn that it's an important subject and so you also begin to desire forgiveness.

Of course, crying out is not the only criterion. It could be a man cries out because he likes to exercise his vocal cords. It's fun to cry out. But if you don't cry out, it's a pretty good sign that you're not that interested. And on Yom Kippur, being interested in *kaparah*, desiring atonement — that's the most important function of the day.

Part II. Understanding Kaparah

The Cleansing Atonement

Now, if this desire, this attitude of wanting is so important, it pays to understand what is meant by this word *kaparah*. If we're expected to long with all our hearts for a full atonement so we have to define it. At least in an abstract way we should be able to put it into words; what is it exactly that I'm desiring?

So of course we understand that it means being cleansed of our sins. *Yechapeir aleichem* means that Hashem wipes you clean. Otherwise who knows what troubles you might have to undergo in this world to settle accounts. And you're lucky if it's in this world because your *neshamah* is stained by those sins, and your *neshamah* is the most important of all the things; it's everything.

You know, our bodies are just a covering. It's an overcoat that is loaned to you for a short time and then you have to give it back. After a hundred years you'll have to take off that suit of flesh and bones and leave it in the ground and you'll go on to the Next World.

Stain Removal Hurts

Now, imagine you show up there and you make your application to enter Gan Eden. But the *malach* standing there with the *cherev hamis'hapeches* says, "Nothing doing. You can't come in looking like this. All those stains! First go and cleanse yourself."

So the *neshamah*, *nebach*, has to go to Gehinnom. *Ay yay yay*! There are no words that we have that are sufficient to describe Gehinnom; there's no suffering in this world that could even compare to Gehinnom. It's not a simple wash; it's a surgery to remove those deep stains that seeped through your clothing and permeated into your soul. And the surgeons there have everything — except anesthesia.

And so if on Yom Kippur it's לִפְנֵי ה' תִּטְהָרוּ – *you'll become purified before Hashem* (Vayikra 16:30), if that's what *kaparah* is, so it's already a tremendous accomplishment! That's enough of a reason why לֹא הָיוּ יָמִים טוֹבִים בְּיוֹם כִּפּוּר (Taanis 26b). Such a happy day! *Kippurim* means to be cleansed; *kaper* means to wipe clean. Your *neshamah* is being transformed on Yom Kippur.

Returning to His Embrace

But pay attention now because that's not the whole story. To be cleansed and be saved from

trouble in this world and the Next World, it's a function of the day but that's not the ultimate purpose. What *kaparah* really means is something else, something much bigger. *It means you're coming close to Hashem after having been estranged from Him*. That's the *purpose* of the cleansing. After having lost favor in His sight, we once more are restored to His favor. Like it says: שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ - *return, Yisroel, to Hashem* (Hoshea 14:2). We come close to Him again!

And that's the real reason that the Jew desires *kaparah*. The essence of atonement is that you want to be reconciled with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. You were in a tiff; you made some kind of quarrel with Him. Maybe it was in a minor way or maybe even a major way, but whatever it is, you walked away. That's what a sin is — you turned your back on Hakadosh Baruch Hu. And the more you sin the further you go away and the more estranged you are from Hashem.

And so it's not only that you have stains, sins, that have to be removed — the worst thing of all is that you're very far away from Hashem. And what is *teshuvah* then? What is *kaparah*? When a person seeks atonement, it means he is seeking to reconcile with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He wants to come back to His favor. And that's the greatest happiness in the world. To gain Hashem's favor again! חַיִּים בִּרְצוֹנוֹ – *Life is only life if it's lived in His favor* (Tehillim 30:6).

A History of Seeking Favor

That's why when you study Tanach, you see again and again that our great men desired Hashem's favor, and a lack of that closeness was the most terrible thing for them. Especially at the beginning of history when people experienced a great measure of the nearness of Hashem, you find that.

That's a principle that explains why you find at the beginning of the Chumash certain attitudes and certain events that you don't find later. At the beginning, Hakadosh Baruch Hu was close to mankind, so close that He spoke to them. He spoke to Adam and He spoke to Kayin and He spoke to others. To us it's remarkable, but that's how the beginning of the Torah is; at the beginning of mankind's history, Hakadosh Baruch Hu was close to mankind. And a sin was measured in that way, in the sense of turning away from Hashem and His closeness and favor dissipating. That was the tragedy of a sin.

Hashem's Embrace

You remember at the beginning it says, וַיִּקַּח ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם – *Hashem took man and put him in Gan Eden* (Bereishis 2:15). So the word וַיִּקַּח is superfluous. It should have said, "He put Adam in Gan Eden." Why does it say וַיִּקַּח, "He took him"?

So the Medrash says, לְקוּחִין הָיָה בּוֹ. It was like marriage — כִּי יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה (Devarim 24:1; see Kiddushin 2a). Hakadosh Baruch Hu took Adam to Him with a very great love at the beginning when he put him into Gan Eden. Not merely He said, "Here's a place for you. Move in." No; וַיִּקַּח – Hakadosh Baruch Hu took Adam close to Him. Every day, Hakadosh Baruch Hu spoke to him. Hashem was מִתְהַלֵּךְ בַּגָּן לְרוּחַ הַיּוֹם – *every day, He came at a certain time, l'ruach hayom, and spoke to Adam* (Bereishis 3:8). It's an existence that we can't imagine, the greatest pleasure, the most tremendous satisfaction.

Hashem's Rejection

But all that was before the *cheit*. When Adam committed a sin, it says וַיְגָרֶשׁ אֶת אָדָם – *Hashem drove out the man* (Bereishis 3:24). So the Medrash says it was *geirushin* (Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Rabbah 1). It was a divorce. The beautiful *shidduch* that took place now was falling apart. Not only he was sent out, but וַיְגָרֶשׁ – he was cut off from this connection with Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Now you understand when Adam marched out of Gan Eden, he didn't merely grieve because he lost that beautiful habitation, that garden with the beautiful fruits and that life of ease. No! He grieved because he lost the greatest joy that a person could have in this life — the favor of Hashem; being close to Him.

Adam had been in a Gan Eden in this world and now when he was sent out, he was not only disgraced, but he was so downcast, so ruined, that he couldn't forget. For over a hundred years, Adam fasted. For many, many scores of years he fasted and he begged Hakadosh Baruch Hu to restore what he once had, that relationship of closeness. That's the tragedy that Adam experienced; it wasn't the stain of the sin — it was the distance between him and Hashem that the stain created.

Kayin Seeks Favor

And the same thing was repeated in the case of Kayin. You remember Kayin thought of the idea of bringing offerings to Hashem. Why an offering? So if you look in the Torah you'll see a remarkable thing about this business of offerings. It states in the Torah, when you bring an offering, a sacrifice to Me, לְרְצוֹנְכֶם תִּזְבָּחֻהוּ – *you should slaughter it for your favor* (Vayikra 19:5). That's not merely a literary phrase; it's a fundamental concept. The purpose of a *korban* is to gain the favor of Hashem, to be close to Him; *korban* is from the word *karov*, close. That's why if there's something wrong with the offering, it says לֹא יֵרָצֶה – *it will not be favored* (*ibid.* 7:18). Because that's the purpose — to achieve His favor.

Now, when Kayin brought that offering, he was doing it because he remembered the good old days that his father had described to him when he was close to the Shechinah. He knew how his father was chastened and how he had grieved for many years. And therefore, Kayin thought of the idea of bringing an offering and regaining the favor of Hashem.

Now, everybody knows what happened. After he brought his offering, his brother Hevel emulated him and also brought an offering — only that he added the element of greater devotion in his offering. And it states, וַיִּשַׁע ה' אֶל הֶבֶל וְאֶל מִנְחָתוֹ – *Hashem favored Hevel and his offering* (Bereishis 4:4). וַיִּשַׁע is from the word *sha'ashuim*, which means to spend time together. וַיִּשַׁע ה' אֶל הֶבֶל means that Hakadosh Baruch Hu showed His closeness. Exactly what happened, I cannot tell you, but something took place then that demonstrated that Hakadosh Baruch Hu was especially satisfied with Hevel's acts.

The Distress of Rejection

And now something remarkable took place. וַיִּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד – *Kayin was exceedingly distressed* (*ibid.* 4:5). Not he was distressed — *exceedingly* distressed. וַיִּפְּלוּ פָּנָיו – *His face fell.* He fell into a tremendous depression as a result of this. He was ruined! He lost favor!

Now, we're surprised by that. We think it's a small matter, a puny, picayune, unimportant matter that broke him. If one of us knew that a friend of ours had gained the good will of Hashem, but you gained money and fame, how much sleep would you lose? But Kayin was wiser than us. He understood the purpose of life and he was ruined!

His entire world crashed because in those days, that was the sole desire of that family. He understood; it was recent history to them. And he had hoped to gain the favor of Hashem, to regain, at least in some measure, the state that his father had formerly possessed. And now when he saw that he wasn't the chosen one, that he failed, it was a catastrophe to him and he fell off balance.

Whatever happened afterwards, what Kayin later did to Hevel was a result of the tremendous disappointment that he experienced at losing his hope of coming close to Hashem. Because that's how people understood in those days before the world was corrupted. They didn't seek anything in this world more than the *retzon Hashem*.

Shaul's Deepest Anxiety

One more example, and it will explain a story that many don't understand. You remember the story when Dovid was anointed by Shmuel Hanavi, so it says, וְרוּחַ ה' סָרָה מֵעִם שָׁאוּל – *the spirit of Hashem departed from Shaul*, וּבִעָתַתּוּ רוּחַ רָעָה מֵאֵת ה' – *and a ruach ra'ah from Hashem caused him anxiety* (Shmuel I 16:14).

So some people are surprised about that. Shaul was mentally unbalanced? He should become depressed?

The answer is there had been a special spirit of closeness to Hashem, of being in His favor, and when that departed, Shaul was almost insane from sorrow. The best happiness is when you're close to Hashem. To know Hashem is happy with you — if you know what life is for, like Shaul did — so it builds you up; it makes you happy, energetic, full of *simcha*. And now that the spirit went out of him, Shaul fell into a deep sadness.

That's a true experience. Those who have the Presence of Hashem and then lose it, they feel that life is no longer worth living. It's like a person who had been enjoying a great buoyancy of spirit for some time. Let's say his metabolism had been successful for some time and he was riding high now. And suddenly there was a change — you know, sometimes there's a change in metabolism, some enzyme drops out of the picture, and everything's upset, and now he's down in the dumps. And so Shaul was sorely beset with sadness because he had lost what his soul was seeking most.

And that's what Yom Kippur really is: וְנִרְצָה לוֹ לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו – *The kaparah brings you back to His favor* (Vayikra 1:4). And that's what makes life successful. We say it every day: כִּי רֶגַע בְּאַפּוֹ – *To be unfavored by Hashem, when He looks with displeasure at you, we want that to pass by in a rega, very quickly*, חַיִּים בִּרְצוֹנוֹ – *because successful life is when we live in Hashem's favor* (Tehillim 30:6). And that's why in the Torah and throughout the whole Tanach we find this idea that the great men endeavored to gain the *retzon Hashem*; they desired that Hakadosh Baruch Hu should look favorably upon them.

Part III. Delaying Kaparah

Changing Styles

Now, this is a concept which most people don't think about. Most people in our modern time think that it's up to us to serve Hashem, to do things to demonstrate our love of Him. But to do things to gain His love of us? It's a concept that's not in style. In ancient days, it was the *only* style, but today not so much.

Why is that so? Why is it that it's not in fashion today? Because of the big difference between our attitude and theirs. We must confess that today our attitude is that we are pretty good people if we do what's required of us. Let's be honest. Because we look around and we see so many disloyal people and so when you are *mekayem* the Shulchan Aruch, you feel that you're doing pretty well by Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

In fact, if you sit in a synagogue Shabbos morning, you see a gentleman come in, he comes in, let's say, 9:30 or 9:45, he walks in without embarrassment; he's complacent because he feels he's doing pretty well. Look how many people don't come at all. He's not ashamed to come in at 9:45. And he puts on his silken *tallis*, he feels he's quite a man. It's a fact. He feels he's conferring who knows how many favors on Hakadosh Baruch Hu. So it's not a question of trying to gain the good will of Hashem. He wants to demonstrate that his heart is in the right place towards the Creator, that he's friendly towards Him. It's *his* good will he is demonstrating.

Satisfied With the Minimum

Now, all this is a caricature but it holds good for the best of us. If you don't analyze yourself, you may not realize that this is the attitude. And it's engendered by comparing ourselves with the faithless masses; we are still faithful and so we're quite satisfied with ourselves.

And therefore, we're not yearning for more closeness to Hashem. We're satisfied with ourselves and we don't even recognize that our souls are down in the dumps when we're separated from Hashem. We're content with this caricature of serving Hashem. But the *kadmonim*, when they served Hakadosh Baruch Hu, they understood that all of their devotion, all of their service was not only

to demonstrate their love of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, but in addition to that there was a second consideration — and that was the desire to gain the *retzon Hashem*. That's what they were seeking.

Three Daily Reminders

And it shouldn't be a new idea to us, because we say it every day in Shemoneh Esrei. If you'll take out a *siddur*, you'll note that *Retzei* follows *Shema Koleinu*. Now, *Shema Koleinu* is a prayer that Hashem should listen to our *tefillos*. שְׁמַע קוֹלֵנוּ – *listen to our prayers*. And we finish by saying, בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' – *we thank You*, שׁוֹמֵעַ תְּפִלָּה – *You listen to prayers*.

But it's followed by another prayer which seems identical. רְצֵה ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ בְּעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבִתְפִלָּתָם – *Hashem, favor Your people, Yisroel, and favor their prayer*. What's this for? We just got through saying, "Listen to our prayers and we thank You for listening," so why now do we say *Retzei*, which seems to say the same thing?

And the answer is it's not the same thing at all. *Retzei* is not that Hashem should accept our prayers and fulfill our desires. No, that's *Shema Koleinu*. *Retzei* is something else — *Retzei* means *we want that Hashem should like us*. "Hashem, favor us. You should have *ratzon* in us. You should love us because we are trying to serve You."

So רְצֵה בְּעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל means *favor Your people*. We're not asking right now to accept our prayers; רְצֵה בִּתְפִלָּתָם means not to answer our *tefillos* but to accept them as an offering to you, as a demonstration of our loyalty and our trust in You.

Praying for Ratzon

That's why we mention the *korbanos*, too, because in the olden days when we had the Beis Hamikdash, Hakadosh Baruch Hu was with His people in the most tangible way. Until the *churban Beis Hamikdash* the first time, the Shechinah was among the Am Yisroel. He was together with His people and we felt His Presence. And so we say, וְהָשֵׁב אֶת הָעֲבוֹדָה לִדְבִיר בֵּיתֶךָ – *bring back the service when we served Hashem with the korbanos that brought us close to Hashem*. By the *korbanos* it states again and again, לְרָצוֹנְכֶם תִּזָּבֵחוּ – *it should be for Your favor* (Vayikra 22:29).

And so that *bracha* we say every day is the crux of our subject. That's the purpose of life, of serving Hashem — to get the good will, the love of Hashem towards you. You live to do things to cause Hakadosh Baruch Hu to regard you with favor. To gain Hashem's favor is one of the most important concepts in the life of a Jew.

Yom Kippur: Day of Reconciliation

And therefore, that's the core of repentance: the desire to come close to Hashem. That feeling of closeness to Him, that's what we're aiming for. It's the *kaparah* of knowing we were restored to His favor. And therefore that's the first *kavanah* when we *daven* on Yom Kippur; we want to be once more reconciled with our greatest Friend, with our true Father. And He's waiting for that!

And now you understand why Yom Kippur is so important. It's an opportunity that every Jew has to grab onto for dear life. Otherwise, you're forgoing the opportunity to reconcile, to find favor with Hashem. If a man doesn't care about this core of *kaparah*, the essence of atonement, then he's not fit for it. If he doesn't have the desire to find favor in the eyes of Hashem, so it won't take place. And his Yom Kippur is an empty day. Of course, it's not really empty; it's still a great achievement, but compared to what it could be…

The Sin of Procrastination

That's why to not take advantage of every minute of the days leading up to Yom Kippur and especially Yom Kippur itself, that itself is a terrible *avlah*, a tremendous sin. Because if you have the chance and you don't grab it, it means you're not so interested in being reconciled with your Father. "It's not so important," you think. "It can wait."

Now, it's true that maybe the punishment won't come so quickly. Hashem is מַאֲרִיךְ אַפֵּיהּ. He waits.

He's patient. So if you delay *kaparah*, it's a gamble, but maybe nothing will happen. You can do *teshuvah* later — maybe. Let's say on Purim you want to do *teshuvah*. Good idea. On Purim, you can be a *baal teshuvah*, too. Everyone is singing and imbibing wine, so who's going to notice if you'll talk to Hashem. "Oh Hashem, *selach lanu*, *mechal lanu*, *kaper lanu*." It's a good *eitzah*. *Teshuvah* is a shield; it's כִּתְרִיס בִּפְנֵי הַפֻּרְעָנוּת – *it protects you like a shield before punishment* (Avos 4:11).

Staying Away

But there's something more than just the punishment. It's the separation from Hashem. A son that can wait — it doesn't hurt him that he is remote from his Father — then the sin is doubled and multiplied because the essence of a sin is to be far away.

You want to be far away? So Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, הִנֵּה רְחֵקֶיךָ יֹאבֵדוּ – *those who are far from Me will go lost* (Tehillim 73:27). It's only those who are close to Hashem, עַם קְרֹבוֹ, *His near people* (*ibid.* 148:14), those who desire His closeness — they're the ones that Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves. It says רוֹצֶה ה' – *To whom does Hashem have ratzon*? It means whom does He favor and whom does He love? אֶת יְרֵאָיו אֶת הַמְיַחֲלִים לְחַסְדּוֹ – *Those who yearn for it* (*ibid.* 147:11).

And therefore, if a man doesn't have that yearning in him and is willing to postpone, to remain outside far away, that is the very worst thing that can happen to a man. It's the catastrophe of all catastrophes.

The Sin Multiplier

That's the great sin of postponing doing *teshuvah*. Putting *teshuvah* off, that's a big error. When a *choteh* postpones returning to Hashem, so his punishment becomes very much heavier; it's multiplied.

And Rabbeinu Yonah in his Shaarei Teshuvah (1:2) gives a *mashal* from the Medrash to explain that. There was a robber that was captured by the king with a number of other robbers and they were put into prison. Now while the robbers were in the jail, they looked around and they saw that the floor was of bricks and in one of the corners they were loose. So some of them began to dig up the bricks and the stones. They broke the cement and underneath there was dirt and they started tunneling. And finally they had a tunnel to the outside and all the robbers crept through the tunnel and escaped. But one of them didn't; one of them remained behind.

In the morning, the warden came and unlocked the cell and saw there was a hole and all the robbers were gone except this one. So he took his stick and started beating him.

So the robber said, "What do you want of me? I'm good. I didn't run away!"

He said, "You fool! Why didn't you escape?" And he was hitting him over the head.

Now, that needs an explanation. Why should the jailer beat this man because he didn't escape? After all, he's a fine man. He remained.

The answer is that if it's possible to escape, if there's a hatch, and you don't use it, that shows that you're not embarrassed about what you did. You're not worried about facing judgment.

Escape to Ratzon

Now all this, you have to know, is a figure of speech. The important element here is the element of being reconciled with Hashem, the idea of *ratzon*. Not wanting to escape means not wanting *ratzon*. And therefore, Hakadosh Baruch Hu is going to give him a bigger punishment for not escaping, because it means you're not interested in coming back to Him. "There's a tunnel called *teshuvah*," Hashem says. "And through that tunnel, you can come back to Me. Not only you'll be clean again; it's a tunnel that brings you back to My favor. So שׁוּבוּ אֶל ה' (Hoshea 14:3)! Sneak through it! You fool! What are you waiting for?"

"Come back to Me!" Hashem says. "I'm waiting with open arms!" That summarizes in a nutshell the

attitude of the Torah towards atonement. He's summoning us to *teshuvah* and He says, "שׁוּבוּ בָנִים שׁוֹבָבִים – *turn back, you wayward children*" (Yirmiyah 3:22).

We're His children; it states that openly in the Torah again and again. בָּנִים אַתֶּם לַה' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם – *You are children to Hashem* (Devarim 14:1). But because of our sins, we're estranged children. And this Father, He's the One Who matters most. הֲלוֹא הוּא אָבִיךָ – *Isn't He your Father*?! (Devarim 32:6). He's a real Father! "כִּי אָבִי וְאִמִּי עֲזָבוּנִי – *My father and mother forsook me*," Dovid said. It means even if you have parents and they care for you, it's the same as if they put you out on the street. They couldn't do a thing for you. "'וַה יַאַסְפֻנִי – *Hashem is the One Who gathers me in*" (Tehillim 27:10).

And so Yom Kippur is the day! The day of ה' יַאַסְפֻנִי! The Day of Restoration! We are happy that we're able to be restored to His favor, to come back once more into the arms of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Part IV. Activating Kaparah

Superficial Ideals

Now, before we conclude, we have to be aware of one important problem. And that is that everything we're speaking about is pure abstraction. Yes, it's a noble ideal; it's a sublime frame of mind when tomorrow evening the Jewish people assemble in the *batei knessios* full of eagerness to be purified and to come close to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Our hearts are contrite and we're willing now to open up our souls so that Hakadosh Baruch Hu should pour in the light of His countenance; like Dovid said: "נְסָה עָלֵינוּ אוֹר פָּנֶיךָ ה' – *lift up and let shine the light of Your face upon us, Hashem*" (Tehillim 4:7). Beautiful. The problem, however, is that it's an abstraction. And unfortunately it's human nature that abstractions, even the greatest ideals, usually don't sink in deeply.

And we have to suspect ourselves, because that's human nature; it's human nature that even with good people, idealism penetrates just a little beneath the surface, but not too deep. I myself recall ideals that I thought I acquired but they didn't penetrate enough. I was walking once on Avenue P. It was wintertime and there was snow on the ground. An Italian called across the street to his neighbor, he said, "Hey, be careful. It's slippery." He was talking to his neighbor, but I prided myself that I once learned in Slabodka and I had picked up Slabodka ideals. So I said to myself, "He's not saying it for his neighbor. He's saying it for me. *Min haShamayim* they had this Italian call across the street to his neighbor for my benefit that I should watch my step." It was really a message for me.

So I was walking along thinking about what a benefit I received from learning in Slabodka and at that moment I slipped on some ice and fell on my back. And lying on my back, I was thinking, "Look how far away the thoughts are from the deeds." It never penetrated — at least not enough to have a real effect. I wasn't any more careful even though I knew the message was for me.

From Wanting to Desiring

And so we see how great is the peril of being satisfied with superficialities and how urgent it is to find ways and means that our ideals should become part of our nature. They shouldn't be in our mouths alone; they should be our mentality, our character. They should become part of our physical consciousness, our personalities. We shouldn't just *talk* about wanting to achieve the *retzon Hashem*, but we should actually *want* it.

And therefore, you have to know how precious the Yom Kippur *davening* is. That's one of the great benefits of Yom Kippur — an entire day of *davening* dedicated to this ideal of coming back to Hashem. And the more you say it, the more it goes into your soul. If every time you strike your heart, *al cheit* for this detail and *al cheit* for that detail, you're thinking not only about the specific sin you want *kaparah* for but also you're aggrieved that you turned away from your Father, and now you're seeking to reconcile with Him, that's a different *al cheit* altogether. Like

Adam and Kayin and Shaul and all of our great men, you're sad and broken that you lost His favor and now you're seeking that Hashem should accept you into His embrace again. If you do that on Yom Kippur again and again all day long, it won't be abstract anymore. You're going to be a changed person.

Talking to Yourself

It's not natural? You don't feel it? So that explains the great amount of time we spend in asking Hakadosh Baruch Hu: *selach lanu*, *mechal lanu*, *kaper lanu*. It would seem that we could better use that time in doing *teshuvah*. So much time is spent on asking the same thing again and again. At least we could spend that time looking through the list of *al cheits* and see what things we are guilty of. Or we could learn Shaarei Teshuvah. There are a lot of things to do on Yom Kippur, and all this praying takes up a lot of valuable time. And it's repetitive, too. Some people, after a few hours, begin to think it's a drag: "I just said this five minutes ago."

The answer is what the Chovos Halevavos says in Shaar Cheshbon Hanefesh (9): מִפְּנֵי שֶׁמַּחְשֶׁבֶת הַנֶּפֶשׁ הוֹלֶכֶת אַחַר הַמַּאֲמָר – *Because the thought of the soul goes after what a man is saying*, וְנִמְשֶׁכֶת אֶל הַדִּבּוּר – *and is drawn after his speech*. He's teaching a very big principle, that what you say is what makes you. The words that issue from your mouth create your mind and your character! It's the speaking that changes your mind. The words bounce back into your ear; they hit your brain. And the more you say it, it bounces back into your mind with much more force. And so when you say again and again, "I'm so sorry for moving away from You," it makes a metamorphosis in your mind.

Shul Hopping

Of course, it doesn't mean you can ignore doing *teshuvah*. That's why in case you remind yourself in the middle of *davening* that you had insulted somebody but right now he is in a different synagogue somewhere in Boro Park, so you have to stop what you're doing and take a walk from here to Boro Park to seek his forgiveness.

I once did that. In the middle of Yom Kippur, I walked over to another shul far away. I asked a man *davening* near the door, "Please call out Mr. So-and-So for me." They called him out. I said, "Sam, please forgive me." He said, "You know I forgive you." Ah! It was a great achievement because כִּי בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם – *Yom Kippur is the day that Hashem cooperates with you and forgives you for what you did* (Vayikra 16:30). And that forgiveness is breaking down barriers for you.

Convincing Yourself

But as soon as you come back into the shul, don't waste a minute. Because the great achievement of Yom Kippur is when we address ourselves to Hakadosh Baruch Hu again and again. And not because *we* want to make an impression *on Him*; He heard you the first time and He knows what He has to do. All of the repetition is in order to impress *us* with the urgency of desiring. All of your words on Yom Kippur are so that *you* should hear what *you're* saying. You become convinced that you want to come back to Hashem's favor, that He should be happy with you.

If you can, shout! "*Selach lanu, mechal lanu, kaper lanu!*" Give a *krechtz* too. Even if you don't mean it, give a *krechtz*: "Oh, Ribono Shel Olam, I want to be close to You again. Please forgive me and take me back." I remember the old Mashgiach in Slabodka R' Hirsch, *z"l*, he *krechtzed* when he said these words on Yom Kippur. He meant it! But we could at least try a little bit. It's very important to *krechtz*, to sigh, to groan, because you estranged yourself from Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

And so when you lean over and you're beating your chest, it's not a formality; it's an opportunity. "Please, Hashem, I want to come close to You again. I want to be Your child. Please accept me as Your loyal subject again."

The Day of Breaking Barriers

And today's the day! דִּרְשׁוּ – *Search for Him*, בְּהִיוֹתוֹ קָרוֹב – *when He's near* (Yeshayah 55:6). Today, He's closest, and therefore every second of Yom Kippur is precious. If Yom Kippur would last a month, it would be the best thing in the world. Of course, we would die of starvation, but otherwise that would be the best thing that could be for us. Because that's our best profit from Yom Kippur. We become convinced that we want to be close to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

A very big benefit! From begging for forgiveness we convince ourselves how important forgiveness is and we learn the necessity of earnestly yearning to be reconciled with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. And as we do *teshuvah*, we are getting rid of the barriers; merely by words we say again and again, we're taking down those barriers, the sins that are blocking our way back to Him, and we're understanding more and more how much we want to come back to Hashem.

That's Yom Kippur! We're saying, "Hashem, we really mean business! We're looking for You. We're seeking You and we really mean it. We want to be reconciled with our greatest Friend, with our true Father Who waits for us!" That's the happiness of Yom Kippur.

Yearning for Hashem

And that's why לֹא הָיוּ יָמִים טוֹבִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּיוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים – *in the ancient days, we didn't have any happy occasions like Yom Kippur* (Taanis 26b). Yom Kippur was one of the two happiest days on the Jewish calendar because in those days, everyone realized what the yearning in his heart was.

Today, not so much. People are yearning for something but they don't realize what for. You might think you're yearning for adventure. You think maybe you're yearning for pleasure, for travel. All these things, you have to know, are errors that people try to substitute in order to still that great desire of their hearts — the desire to come close to Hashem.

And therefore, Yom Kippur — when that day came and cleansed our forefathers and caused them to be reconciled to their Father in Heaven, it caused them the greatest joy in the year. They confessed their sins and they did whatever was necessary according to the Torah, and they left the shul on *motzei* Yom Kippur with a light heart, their faces expressing the greatest joy — the joy of being forgiven for one's sins and being once again reconciled. That's how the Jew understood Yom Hakippurim — the day of fulfilling the true yearning of a Jew: to be reunited with Hashem.

Now, in this life, of course, it'll never be fulfilled completely. The true fulfillment of coming close to Hashem is when we'll join Hashem in the Afterlife and we'll feast our eyes on the splendor of his Shechinah. That's the reconciliation, the *deveikus*, that has no equal. But in the meantime, our function in this world is to come as close as we can to Him, and Yom Kippur was created for that purpose. It's the day of greatest happiness to have this stone of heaviness, of sins, taken off our hearts because it means that we're with Hashem again.

Celebrating Our Return

And that's why we go home and eat a big *seudah* on *motzei* Yom Kippur. That's the *minhag Yisroel*, when we get home from shul after Yom Kippur, we set a table and everybody is in a festive mood.

So some think that it's a celebration; because I did such a great job on Yom Kippur, now I'm enjoying the fruits of my labor. No, that's not it. You know what you're celebrating? You're celebrating that you're restored to Hashem's favor! You're celebrating that you spent the day speaking, begging, wanting, desiring, wishing and thinking about being restored to His favor, and now you're happy that you accomplished. After Yom Kippur you are full of gratitude that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave you this day to come back to Him, to be restored to His favor. And you're so happy with regaining that favor, regaining that status as a loyal subject, that you're celebrating it.

Of course, it means that you made up your mind that all year round you want to maintain that. As much as you can, this gain that you achieved — that Hashem favors you and that the King has taken you back as a loyal subject — you're going to continue from now on all year long and all your life. That's what the *motzei*-Yom-Kippur Jew should be thinking when he smacks his lips and dives into the food.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos
and a Gemar Chasimah Tovah

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Let's Get Practical

Coming Back To Him

Yom Kippur is a day of unparalleled happiness because it affords us the opportunity to reunite with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Sins create a blockage, and when our slate is cleared, we can reconnect.

This Yom Kippur, *bli neder*, I am going to *daven* with more energy, raising the volume of my voice — if I can get away with it. As I say the words of the *tefillos*, aside from yearning to have my sins forgiven, I will have in mind that my most deep and fundamental desire is to have closeness with Hashem.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:
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QUESTION

We're supposed to ask each other for forgiveness before Yom Kippur. Can you explain the procedure that one might use to seek people's forgiveness?

ANSWER

When we wish to get someone to forgive us, I will suggest a diplomatic approach.

Go over to him and say, "You know, it's coming close to Yom Kippur, and the Jewish nation has a custom of asking forgiveness of each other. So maybe we'll say to each other that we forgive each other for what we know and what we don't know — it means for things you know that I did against you or what you don't know. Let's forgive each other for everything."

And if he agrees, if he does it, so it's done; it's valid. It's like a man who signs away his possessions. Once he signs, it's already done; if he forgives you, it's done.

Now, if you're going to approach him and say, "You know, I have something on my conscience that I did against you," so he'll get all heated up and he might think twice about forgiving you. So you're better off using my system and get him to forgive you as a formality.

It's a beautiful thing among Orthodox Jews to use this formality. Even in the home it's a beautiful *minhag*. You know, R' Itzele Peterburger, *zichrono livracha*, on *erev* Rosh Hashanah before he went out of his house to the shul, he turned back and said to his wife, "*Zeit mir moichel* – be *mochel* me please." And she was a smart woman; she said, "*Un zei du mir moichel*."

Oooh, that is wonderful. That's how the stains on your *neshamah* are wiped clean. It is a tremendous thing. Ask your wife to be *mochel* you before you come to shul on Yom Kippur. If you don't do that, there is a long list she has; she has a very long list against you! And so, whatever you do, you have to get forgiveness; you must get forgiveness or nothing will help.

This way, everybody forgives the other one, and so they start with a clean conscience.

September 1979