

We introduce our *Vidui* / confession on *Yom Kippur* with the prayer: "You know the secrets of the universe and the most hidden mysteries of all the living. You probe all innermost chambers and test thoughts and emotions. Nothing is hidden from You, and nothing is concealed from Your eyes. And so may it be Your will, *Hashem*, our *Elokim* and the *Elokim* of our forefathers, that You forgive us for all our errors, and You pardon us for all our iniquities, and You atone for us for all our willful sins."

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first *Ashkenazic* Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*) writes that the praises of *Hashem* in this prayer parallel the three main parts of *Teshuvah*: regretting one's sin, changing one's ways, and accepting upon oneself not to return to that sin.

True regret requires understanding the negative effects that a Jew's sin has upon the entire universe. But who can really understand the effects of our sins other than *Hashem*? Only "You know the secrets of the universe and the most hidden mysteries of all the living."

And who can really say that he has completely abandoned his sinful ways? Only *Hashem* can know that! "You probe all innermost chambers and test thoughts and emotions."

Finally, do we really know what circumstances we will find ourselves in in the future such that we can be assured of not sinning again? We don't know. But, "Nothing is hidden from You, and nothing is concealed from Your eyes."

Even so, we plead, we have done our best. Therefore, please forgive, pardon, and atone. (*Siddur Olat Re'iyah* II p.353)

## After Yom Kippur . . .

**"You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a citron tree, the branches of date palms, twigs of a plaited tree, and brook willows . . ." (23:40)**

*Midrash Rabbah* teaches: On *Erev Rosh Hashanah*, the *Gedolei Ha'dor*/ great people of the generation fast, and *Hashem* releases the people from one third of their sins. Between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, individuals fast, and *Hashem* releases the people from one third of their sins. On *Yom Kippur*, everyone fasts--men, women, and children--and *Hashem* says, "What was, was. Going forward, we will start a new accounting."

The *Midrash* continues: From *Yom Kippur* until *Sukkot*, all of the Jewish People are busy with *Mitzvot*--this one with building a *Sukkah* and this one with buying a *Lulav*, etc. On the first day of *Sukkot*, all of the Jewish People stand before *Hashem* with their *Lulavim* and *Eitrogim* in honor of *Hashem*, and He says to them, "What was was. Going forward, we will start a new accounting." Thus, Moshe tells *Bnei Yisrael*, "You shall take for yourselves on the first day," [*i.e.*, the first day of the new accounting]. [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R' David Halevi z"l (1586-1667; Poland; known as the "Taz") asks: Why should the fact that we are preparing for *Sukkot* during the days after *Yom Kippur* be a reason to overlook any sins that we commit during that period? He explains that the *Midrash* should be understood as follows:

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### ***On the Importance of Appeasing Those We Have Hurt***

Our Sages teach that one cannot achieve atonement unless he appeases those against whom he has sinned. Some say that one cannot achieve atonement even for his sins against G-d unless he has properly atoned for his sins against man and received forgiveness. (Kaf Ha'Chaim 606:3)

Why? Because atoning for only some sins is like immersing only part of one's body in a *Mikvah*. Obviously, one does not attain purity by doing so.

(Mussar Ha'Mishnah)

R' Avraham Halevi Horowitz z"l (16<sup>th</sup> century; father of the *Shelah Hakadosh*) observes:

The obligation to ask forgiveness from those we have offended does not mean doing what is commonly done, *i.e.*, that shortly before *Kol Nidrei*, one approaches his friends and asks their forgiveness. Inevitably, the friend responds, "You didn't do anything for which I have to forgive you." Then, these two friends forgive each other, something that was not necessary at all, since they were always dear to each other and would never wish each other harm.

In contrast, R' Horowitz continues, enemies tend not to ask forgiveness from one another. Rather, each one says, "If he were interested in peace, he would come to me." A wise man, however, recognizes that the true sign of strength is humility, and he takes the initiative to appease his enemy, even if his enemy is in the wrong. (Emek Berachah)

R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l writes: Requesting general forgiveness for all sins that one has committed against another is effective only for minor offenses. [If one committed a more serious offense, he must specify it when he requests forgiveness.] (Quoted in *Halichot Shlomo: Mo'adim* p.44)

If one who has sinned against you does not come to you to seek forgiveness, you should make yourself available to him so that he might ask forgiveness.

(Mateh Ephraim)

**Because Yom Kippur does not atone until one appeases his neighbor, one should be certain to recite the following prayer (part of *Tefilah Zakkah*) which is printed in many *Machzorim*:**

"I extend complete forgiveness to everyone who has sinned against me, whether physically or financially, or who has gossiped about me or even slandered me; so, too, anyone who has injured me, whether physically or financially, and for any sins between man and his neighbor--except for money that I wish to claim and that I can recover in accordance with *Halachah*, and except for someone who sins against me and says, 'I will sin against him and he will forgive me'--except for these, I grant complete forgiveness, and may no person be punished on my account.

"And just as I forgive everyone, so may You (*Hashem*) grant me favor in every person's eyes so that he will grant me complete forgiveness."

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When various subsets of the Jewish People fast on *Erev Rosh Hashanah* and during the *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah* / Ten Days of Penitence, *Hashem* does not erase one third, and then a second third, of our sins. Rather, He places those sins on hold with the intention of forgiving them entirely if we complete the *Teshuvah* process on *Yom Kippur*.

One might think, therefore, continues the *Taz*, that that is also what *Hashem* does on *Yom Kippur*--not forgiving us entirely, but only placing any punishment in abeyance. No! says the *Midrash*. Following *Yom Kippur*, *Hashem* declares: "What was was. Going forward, we will start a new accounting." The day after is truly "the first day"!

But why, then, is the first day of the new accounting the first day of *Sukkot* and not the day immediately after *Yom Kippur*? For a very practical reason, answers the *Midrash*, as explained by the *Taz*: During the days between *Yom Kippur* and *Sukkot*, we are too preoccupied with preparations for *Sukkot* to have time to sin. In contrast, on *Yom Tov*, when we feast and drink, we are prone to sin.

(*Turei Zahav, Orach Chaim*, beginning of *Siman* 581)

R' Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter z"l (1847-1905; second *Gerrer Rebbe*) explains differently. He writes: It is not far-fetched that preparing to do a *Mitzvah* should provide greater protection against sin than actually doing the *Mitzvah*.

Firstly, he writes, actually doing a *Mitzvah* takes a finite amount of time. For example, one picks up the *Lulav*, and he is done. In contrast, preparing to perform *Mitzvot* with the proper intentions and purity is a never-ending occupation, for one must constantly be on guard against those aspects of this world that would distract him from his lofty goal.

Also, one rarely performs a *Mitzvah* perfectly. In contrast, while one is preparing to perform the *Mitzvah*, he certainly aspires to perform it perfectly, exactly as G-d has commanded. (In this sense, his aspiration to perform the *Mitzvah* is at a higher level than his actual performance.)

The *Gemara* (*Yoma* 29a) teaches, "Thoughts of sin are worse than sin itself." Certainly, then, concludes the *Gerrer Rebbe*, thoughts of a *Mitzvah*--*i.e.*, the genuine longing that a person has to perform G-d's command properly--can be more meaningful than the *Mitzvah* itself and they can protect a person from sinning.

(*Sefat Emet* 5634)

***We wish our readers a  
Gmar Chatimah Tovah & Chag Same'ach!***