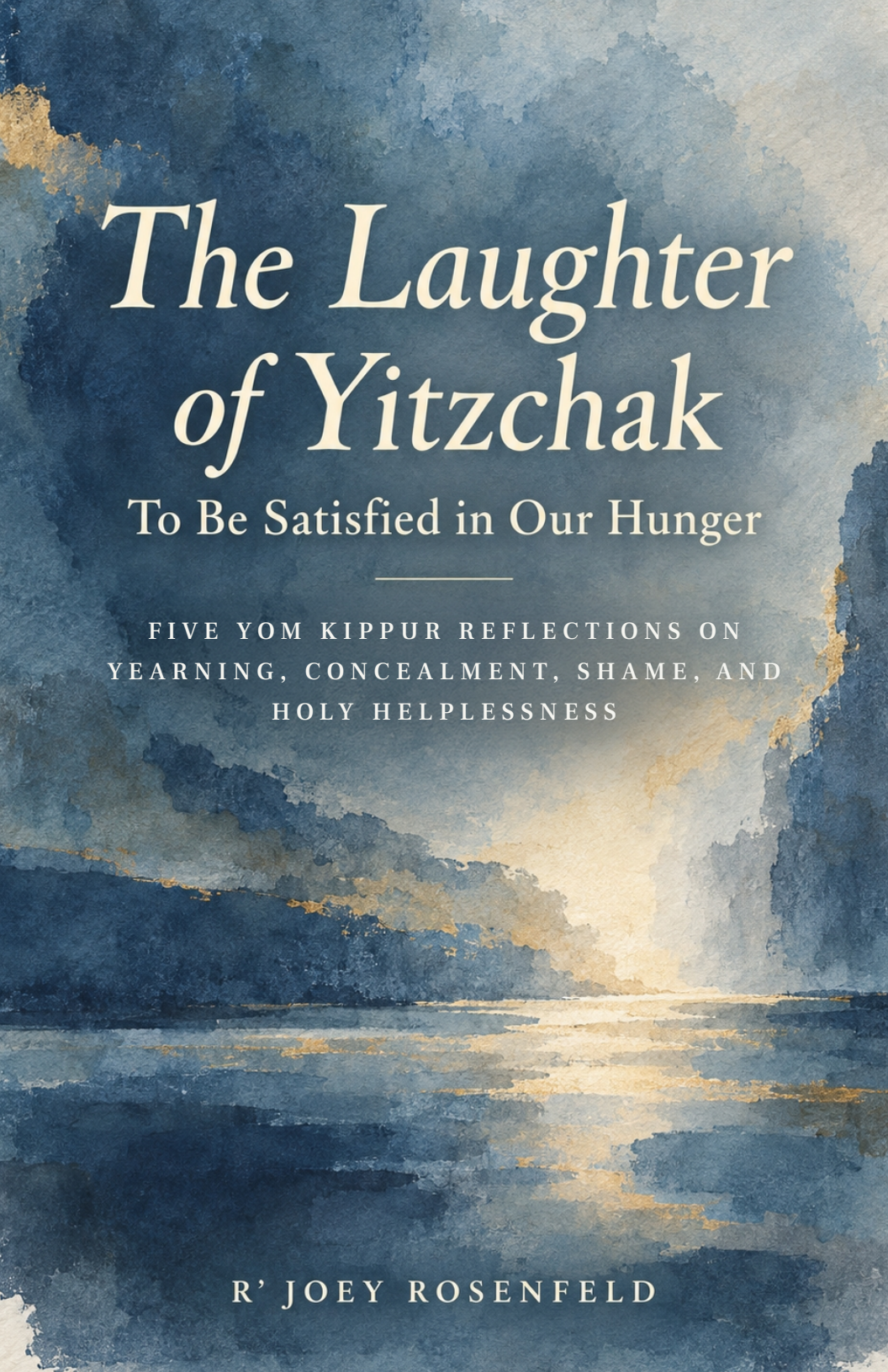




The Laughter of Yitzchak

To Be Satisfied in Our Hunger

FIVE YOM KIPPUR REFLECTIONS ON
YEARNING, CONCEALMENT, SHAME, AND
HOLY HELPlessness

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1. To Find Satisfaction Within the Yearning Itself

Beneath the Severity of the Day

Be'ezrat Hashem, as we prepare ourselves during the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah (עשרת ימי תשובה) for Yom HaKippurim (יום הכיפורים), we approach a day of taharah (טהרה), purification, and Ashreichem Yisrael (אשריכם ישראל). It is a day on which the full power and expansiveness of the Jewish neshamah (נשמה) are revealed.

Externally, Yom Kippur can feel like the most difficult day. At least for me, as someone who is not a good faster, it can be a very long and heavy day. It appears to be a day of din (דין), judgment, and fear. Yet beneath that severity rests the unbreakable koach (כוח) of the Jewish neshamah.

Beneath the inuyim (עינויים), beneath the withdrawal from physical pleasure, lies the secret of a neshamah rooted in ta'anug (תענוג). This pleasure is so great and so unfathomable in relation to our limited understanding that it can express itself only through not engaging in anything physical at all.

The fasting and the inuyim of Yom HaKippurim are not necessarily rooted in fear. They are not a punishment through which we deprive ourselves of pleasure. They are a gesture toward the recognition that there is no pleasure in this

world that can compare with the pleasure emerging from Nishmat Yisrael (נשמת ישראל) and our deveikut (דבקות) with HaKadosh Baruch Hu (הקדוש ברוך הוא).

Even the greatest delicacies and pleasures of this world become minimal in relation to that true pleasure. When what we seek is so lofty that worldly pleasures become almost child's play, the fitting expression is to refrain from them and wait for the true source of ta'anug.

From Affliction to Delight

The ikar avodah (עיקר העבודה) of Yom HaKippurim is to move through its external appearance. From the outside, the day looks like ta'anit (תענית), inuy (עינוי), suffering, withdrawal, and the diminishment of the self. Its inward reality, however, is not inuy but ta'anug.

The Tikunei Zohar points toward this when it teaches that Yom HaKippurim is a day like Purim. The very name Kippurim suggests a likeness to Purim. When one thing is compared with another, the second is generally understood as the loftier measure: this person is like that person in greatness.

When we say that Yom HaKippurim is like Purim, we imply that Yom Kippur comes close to giving us a taste of the pleasures of Purim. The tachlit (תכלית) of Yom HaKippurim

is to reach a point of unity at which its ta'anit and inuy are transformed and revealed as oneg (עונג), ta'anug, and the presence of Yom HaPurim.

As the Vilna Gaon famously points out in Likkutei HaGra, and as Rav Yitzchak Isaac Chaver and Rav Hutner explain at length, Yom HaKippurim and Yom HaPurim are two sides of the same coin. The external experience of Yom Kippur is suffering, restraint, and withdrawal, but its innermost point is the secret of the ta'anug of Purim.

This does not mean that there is Yom Kippur and, separately, there is Purim. It means that the mochin (מוחין) of Purim are present within Yom HaKippurim. The tachlit is to transform the inuy itself into a source of ta'anug, and the bitterness and withdrawal of the body into a state of pleasure.

The World of Understanding and Return

The Mitteler Rebbe of Chabad, Reb Dovber Shneuri, the son of the Baal HaTanya, gives particular force to this teaching. The Mitteler Rebbe is associated with binah (בינה), understanding, and Yom HaKippurim is marked by an aliyah (עלייה) into the world of binah.

Binah is the shoresh (שורש) of teshuvah (תשובה), the root of freedom, and the root of release from every form of stuckness. Through binah, the apparent distance between hunger and satisfaction begins to collapse.

Satisfaction Hidden Within Hunger

The Mitteler Rebbe turns to the verses lehachayotam bara'av (להחיותם ברעב) and lehasbia betzachtzachot nafshecha (להשביע בצחצחות נפשך). These verses describe the Jewish people in famine, deficiency, yearning, and scarcity - the feeling that I do not have what I need - together with the promise that HaKadosh Baruch Hu will satisfy us from within that place.

At first, the promise seems to describe two stages: years of bitterness, smallness, desire, and deficiency, followed by a time of fullness. Yet the Baal HaTanya and the Mitteler Rebbe show that these two experiences can be found within each moment itself.

Lehachayotam bara'av does not mean only that famine will eventually be redeemed by sustenance. It means that one can find sustenance within hunger, within the ra'avon (רעבון) itself. Within withdrawal, restraint, and the secret of inuy, one may discover a deeper ta'anug than can be found by satisfying bodily urges in a practical way.

By holding back, cultivating desire, and living in the space before arrival, we can taste a light greater than the destination itself. The hunger becomes the tachlit. The hishtokeikut (השתוקקות), the yearning born from the awareness that something is missing, possesses a spiritual value that can be loftier than a state of satisfaction or sippuk (סיפוק), which we will encounter on Sukkot.

The same is true of lehasbia betzachtzachot nafshecha. The satisfaction of thirst does not come only when HaKadosh Baruch Hu quenches it. The quenching is found within the thirst itself.

Where the Desire Becomes the Meeting Place

This is the model of Yom HaKippurim. We disengage from the physical not because we are denying ourselves or punishing ourselves for inhabiting a sinful body, God forbid. We do so because we can say: Ribono shel Olam (ריבונו של עולם), here in my desire for You, in my dissatisfaction, in my scarcity, and in the feeling that I do not have enough, this is where I will find You.

When I lean into the avodah (עבודה) of Yom HaKippurim, and into the secret of Purim resting at its heart, I begin to find satisfaction within desire itself.

The Mittlerer Rebbe wrote a kuntres called Sha'ar HaYichud. His student, Reb Hillel Paritcher, wrote a remarkable commentary. In the chaf of the Likkutei Biurim on Sha'ar HaYichud, he explains the inner movement from Yom HaKippurim to Sukkot and then to Shemini Atzeret.

The Concealment Beyond Revelation

Yom HaKippurim is called Shabbat Shabbaton (שבת שבתון), the Shabbat of all Shabbatot. It is lema'alah mibechinat Shabbat, higher than the level of Shabbat we encounter now. Shabbat offers a hint of the future, but Yom HaKippurim reaches toward ha'atzmut hane'elam (העצמות הנעלם), what the sefarim call he'elem ha'atzmi (העלם העצמי), essential concealment.

Essential concealment is not the result of our being unworthy of revelation. Some things are hidden because we have not yet earned them or because we remain caught behind meni'ot (מניעות). Such concealment asks to be overcome so that we can arrive at revelation.

There is, however, a higher concealment: yoshev beseter Elyon (יושב בסתר עליון), the elevated transcendence of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. As the Rambam teaches, it can be approached only bederech shelilah (בדרך שלילה), through the recognition that it lies beyond comprehension. We cannot

claim true hasagah (השגה); we can recognize only the limits of our grasp.

Rebbe Nachman repeats in the name of the tzaddikim: tachlit hayediah shelo neda (תכלית הידיעה שלא נדע). The culmination of knowledge is to recognize that, in the end, we do not know.

To Know That We Cannot Know

This is not ignorance born from a deficient mind. It is the unknowing that comes after everything available to be known has been known, when I finally come to know that I cannot know.

That is the concealment of Yom HaKippurim. It is not concealment as a symptom or failure. It is the concealment found at the end of the journey, when amarti echkamah (אמרתי אהכמה), I thought I would become wise, gives way to vehi rechokah mimeni (והיא רחוקה ממני), but it remained distant from me.

The distance exists because HaKadosh Baruch Hu is so great, so infinite, and so far beyond comprehension that the human mind can grasp only its own perpetual limitation. What remains is emunah (אמונה). This is not a consequential concealment caused by something external, but an essential

concealment emerging from the transcendence of the thing itself.

He'elem ha'atzmi is the highest point we can reach. It is ta'anug ha'atzmi (תענוג העצמי), ta'anug hane'elam (תענוג הנעלם): a concealed pleasure so immense that it can be revealed only by not engaging in pleasure.

When Abstinence Becomes the Vessel

This is the light of Yom HaKippurim, beyond the light of Shabbat. On Shabbat, we still taste a glimmer of the or le'atid lavo (אור לעתיד לבוא), and therefore we can partake of the food of this world.

On Yom HaKippurim, when we taste the future itself, the vessel is he'elem ha'atzmi and ta'anug hane'elam. Through refraining, we recognize that the pleasure we seek lies beyond the capacity of this world.

Through teshuvah me'umka deliba (תשובה מעומקא דליבא), return from the depth of the heart, we approach atzmus (עצמות), kavyachol (כביכול). Not true atzmus, which remains utterly beyond us, for kedushati lema'alah mikedushatchem (קדושותי למעלה מקדושתכם). We ask, vehachazireinu biteshuvah sheleimah lefanecha (והחזירנו בתשובה שלמה לפניך), and lifnei Hashem titharu (לפני ה' תטהרו). We seek a place that is lifnei

Hashem, before the Divine Name, as though we were already living in the future.

In that future, it becomes clear that the only vessel capable of giving us even the essence of Divine pleasure is to do nothing and partake of nothing. Therefore, *ne'esar kol minei oneg beYom HaKippurim*: every form of physical pleasure is prohibited on Yom Kippur.

Because a revelation shines from the essence of the Infinite Light, *mei'atzmus Ein Sof kavyachol* (מעצמות אין סוף כביכול), the source of all *ta'anugim* and the true shore of *Nishmat Yisrael*, no lower pleasure can contain it. The only vessel is its apparent opposite: *inuy*.

The Fullness of Not Knowing

The Mittlerer Rebbe and Reb Hillel Paritcher are saying something powerful. Because we are being exposed to the source of all pleasure, the only vessel capable of receiving even a taste of that pleasure is the negation of worldly pleasure.

By recognizing that the pleasures of this world cannot hold a candle to the pleasures of *le'atid lavo*, by refraining, by knowing that I cannot know, and by grasping what I cannot grasp about myself and about *Ribono shel Olam*, I become *masig* (משיג) precisely through non-attainment.

This is what Rebbe Nachman explains repeatedly, and what the Leshem understands the Rambam to mean in his emphasis on negative theology. It is not a limited ignorance born from deficiency. It is the fullest culmination of the human capacity to know: the realization that I am profoundly far from knowing anything.

The only thing I can do is live with temimut (תמימות) and peshitut (פשיטות), dress myself in white, and speak the words written in the siddur. Hunger is normal; to be human is to be hungry, and to be hungry is to be human. Yet on Yom Kippur, every pang awakens the recognition that what I truly hunger for is far greater than anything available here.

Within the hunger, the desire, and the pain of restraint, I encounter a nitzotz (ניצוץ), a spark of ta'anug hane'elam and yichud hane'elam (ייחוד הנעלם).

The Pleasure That Cannot Yet Be Felt

This is also the secret of Purim and ad delo yada (עד דלא ידע). The Zohar HaKadosh teaches that the light of Yom HaKippurim is the light of inuy, a ta'anug habilti murgash (תענוג הבלתי מורגש), an unfelt pleasure. I do not feel anything; it feels empty and painful.

Purim, by contrast, is ta'anug hamurgash (תענוג המורגש), a felt pleasure. A person experiences the physical satisfaction available in this world.

Rav Yitzchak Meir Morgenstern, based on the sefarim of Chabad from the first generation to the last, explains that the tachlit is not to remain with the knowledge that Yom Kippur contains an unfelt pleasure. That knowledge is holy, and the neshamah understands it, but the guf (גוף) must also receive what it needs.

As we understand from Rebbe Nachman, the Gra, and anshei Chabad, the body is the final frontier. Revealing Godliness in the dirah betachtonim (דירה בתחתונים) is the greatest transformation available to us.

It is therefore not enough to know that the light of Purim is hidden within Yom Kippur, or that the fast contains satisfaction within desire. The spiritual benefit of the neshamah must reach the body. We must move from unfelt pleasure into felt pleasure and then bring felt pleasure back into the unfelt: ta'anug habilti murgash hamitlabesh bemurgash, an unfelt pleasure clothed within the felt.

This Hunger This Feeling This Urge

A Jew arrives on Yom HaKippurim carrying a deep awareness of iniquity and unworthiness. We can find it difficult to

believe that we have access to the place of taharah or to the Kodesh HaKodashim (קודש הקודשים) within ourselves.

The day can become difficult and long. The details of the avodah of the Beit HaMikdash, and of the Kohen Gadol entering lifnai velifnim (לפני ולפנים), can feel distant. If I am honest about my own experience, the time can move painfully slowly, the pages can feel immense, and the attention demanded by every detail can become a kind of spiritual boredom. Yom Kippur can then seem to be only about fasting and refraining.

But precisely when the intensity of the fast is felt, when the body experiences withdrawal from the pleasures of this world and we struggle to satisfy the desire for Godliness, we must pause. We must close our eyes and pay attention to something simple.

This hunger, this feeling, this urge, and this craving are the knowledge that something lies just beyond my grasp. It may appear to be food, water, or whatever I imagine will satisfy me. Instead of fleeing the desire, let me live within it. Let me recognize that I am a human being who is deficient, who lacks something, and let me sit with that reality.

Let me sit with the desire, dig more deeply into the hunger, and learn that I can survive the pangs. I can survive the thoughts telling me that I cannot survive.

Drawing Purim Into Yom Kippur

When a person finds yishuv hada'at (יישוב הדעת) within the hunger, within the ta'anug habilti murgash, that person draws the line of Purim into Yom HaKippurim. The displeasure of Yom Kippur is transformed into the deep pleasure of Purim, revealing the secret of Purim at the heart of the fast.

The secret is tachlit hayediah shelo neda: I do not know, and I cannot feel everything. What I need to receive from Ribono shel Olam is something I must believe in. It is too powerful to be felt by the limited technology of the body as it exists here and now.

The only fitting gesture toward a pleasure beyond comprehension is to refrain from the smaller pleasures of the flesh, even though they are holy and wonderful. Yom HaKippurim gives me access to lehachayotam bera'av: satisfaction within yearning.

The purpose is not to extinguish the burning flames of desire, but to honor the desire and cultivate ratzon (רצון). The entire day is ratzon for taharah - a longing to become pure.

To Discover That We Have Arrived

Kol hamechubar letahor tahor hu (כל המחובר לטהור טהור הוא). Yom Kippur is a day of hishtokeikut, ga'agu'im (געגועים), and kisufin (כיסופין) for the Kodesh HaKodashim.

Bezot yavo Aharon el hakodesh (בזאת יבוא אהרן אל הקודש). It is specifically through the yearning to enter that forbidden place of holiness that we suddenly discover: I am here now. This is exactly where I have been trying to arrive. I have been trying to arrive at the place of hishtokeikut itself.

Kol Nidrei and the Holiness of the Promise

In Kol Nidrei (כל נדרי), when we release our promises, we are not saying that fulfilling them does not matter. We must put every ounce of effort into fulfilling our promises and nedarim (נדריים). Yet Kol Nidrei teaches that the ikar tachlit is also to make the neder: to possess yearning and the desire to reach a spiritual ideal, even when we may not reach it.

We learn to value that desire and to accept that we have not accomplished everything we wanted. Yom HaKippurim teaches that desire is not dependent upon actualization. We must yearn for actualization, but reality is reality, and HaKadosh Baruch Hu runs the world as He runs the world.

We say: Ribono shel Olam, do not judge us negatively, ki chol ha'am bishgagah (כי לכל העם בשגגה). Everything we do is accidental; none of this is deliberate. If You want us to serve You, make it easy to serve You. If You want us to grasp You, make it easy to grasp You. If You want us to taste Kodesh HaKodashim, give us Kodesh HaKodashim.

This is happening more and more through the tzaddikim amitiyim (צדיקים אמיתיים) and the Torah of our generation. Still, we say to Ribono shel Olam: ki chol ha'am bishgagah.

Praying With the Unfinished Self

Once I release the shame that tells me I am entirely responsible, I can acknowledge myself among the avaryanim (עבריינים). Yesh lanu reshut lehitpalel im ha'avaryanim (יש לנו רשות להתפלל עם העבריינים): we give ourselves permission to pray with the unfinished and stuck parts of ourselves.

When Kol Nidrei allows us to acknowledge that we are not entirely at fault, it does not end our yearning. We will still take on desires and commitments in the coming year, even knowing that we may not accomplish them all.

The entire movement of Yom HaKippurim is the taharah of the mikveh (מקווה), the taharah of kivui (קיווי), of hoping toward something. Within hope and desire lies the deepest satisfaction, because the neshamah wants what it yearns

toward. Yearning is the food of the neshamah: the kisufin, the ga'agu'im, and the hunger itself.

Sometimes that yearning feels like physical hunger, and a person must surrender to it and realize: I will survive, and I will continue. In this moment of not having what I feel I need, I can close my eyes and recognize that the feeling of not having contains exactly what I need. This is the avodah of teshuvah on Yom HaKippurim.

The Yearning of Binah

Yom HaKippurim is a day of binah. It is a revelation of the world of teshuvah, and binah is a space of thirst, hunger, desire, and hishtokeikut for more.

We have learned this from the tzaddikim: Rav Yitzchak Meir Morgenstern, Rebbe Nachman, the Zohar HaKadosh, the students of the Baal Shem Tov, the students of the Gra, the Rashash, the Ramchal, the tzaddikim amitiyim sheshochnei afar heimah (צדיקים אמיתיים ששוכני עפר המה), and the tzaddikim of our generation.

Within the unsatisfied desire associated with binah, within the unrequited passion of the human condition, rests a capacity that is singularly human: the power to find satisfaction within desire itself. The malachim (מלאכים) do not understand this.

Higher Than the Angels

On Yom HaKippurim, we appear to be like malachim so that they do not stand in our way. In truth, we rise higher than the malachim. An angel possesses satisfaction, but a human being possesses hunger and the koach of hishtokeikut - the capacity to find ta'anug within inuy itself.

That capacity becomes the keli ra'ui (כלי ראוי), the fitting vessel through which we draw down the holiest form of pleasure. We say: Ribono shel Olam, I will always yearn for You. We find satisfaction in the pleasure of the previous year and then cultivate further desire, until the entire year becomes a year of Yom HaKippurim and Purim.

We live with desire and satisfaction, only to discover more desire ad ein sof (עד אין סוף), because kedushati lema'alah mikedushatchem. At Ne'ilah (נעילה), at the highest point in the rectification of all five parts of the self, we clarify the nekudah (נקודה) of Malchut (מלכות).

We arrive at Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad (שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד) and Hashem Hu HaElokim (ה' הוא האלקים). We recognize that satisfaction rests within concealment and within desire itself.

Elokim is desire, yearning, and vatechasreihu me'at me'Elokim (ותחסרהו מעט מאלקים). It is the shoresh of

ga'agu'im and deficiency. At the very core of that desire, we find Hashem, Havayah, and sheleimut hakol (שלימות הכל).

Holding Affliction and Pleasure Together

This is the balancing act of Yom HaKippurim: to hold inuy and ta'anug together. We do not destroy the inuy or abandon restraint in the name of satisfaction. We seek lehachayotam bara'av - satisfaction within yearning itself.

This is the secret Rebbe Nachman sought to draw down when he prayed for a gilui (גילוי), a revelation of Torah from Atika Stima'ah (עתיקא סתימאה). It is the Torah already before us; it does not change one iota. Yet it is a revelation of Torah that gives a person permission to be who they are, to live with desire, and to discover that desire itself can become the source of satisfaction.

Rebbe Nachman said that he was unable to complete this tikkun (תיקון). A fire consumed Breslov, and during Kol Nidrei the townspeople had to run to save their possessions instead of saying the piyutim. This was a great kitrug (קטרוג) that Rebbe Nachman was experiencing.

The Fire of Yearning

The fire in Breslov can be understood through Reb Nosson's words: Eish bo'er beBreslov, ha'aver otah belibi - a fire burns in Breslov; let it burn in my heart. It is the fire of teshukah (תשוקה), yearning, and desire.

Perhaps the tachlit Rebbe Nachman sought to reveal was the secret of finding satisfaction within desire itself: sippuk within safek (ספק), and sustenance within deficiency.

When this is not understood properly, an abundance of desire can remain trapped in the world of binah. Deficiency, without the secret of Atik clothed within binah, can become a consuming fire. As we know, the dinim that emerge from binah can transform unbridled passion into a yearning that contains no satisfaction.

The secret of the teachings of Rebbe Nachman, Reb Nosson, the Baal HaTanya, the Gra, and all the tzaddikim is that satisfaction is present within yearning itself.

Erev Yom HaKippurim and the Dance of Desire

This truth is expressed most fully on Erev Yom HaKippurim (ערב יום הכיפורים). Rav Tzadok describes it as a radical day on which eating is for the sake of desire, followed by Yom Kippur, when desire is for the sake of eating.

On Erev Yom HaKippurim, we give pleasure to the body. We say that it may partake, and, *aderaba* (אדרבה), that partaking is a mitzvah (מצווה). Yom Kippur is not a punishment or a negation of the human condition.

If it were, the ninth of Tishrei would not be part of the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah. That day corresponds to the middah (מידה) of Yesod (יסוד), whose secret is that if you feed it, it will remain hungry, and if you do not feed it, it can find satisfaction.

The point is not simply to partake or not to partake. It is to partake in a way that leaves room for desire, and to desire in a way that leaves room for satisfaction. We seek the place of desire within satisfaction and satisfaction within desire.

From there we enter the light of simchah (שמחה), the seudah (סעודה) of the Livyatan (ליויתן), and the secret of the Simchat Beit HaSho'evah (שמחת בית השואבה), where desire and satisfaction operate together in both body and soul.

The True Fast

Be'ezrat Hashem, may we merit a ta'anit amiti (תענית אמיתית), a true fast, in which every pain and struggle becomes another opportunity for mesirut nefesh (מסירות נפש) in the belief: Ribono shel Olam, yesh li kol (יש לי כל). I have what I need.

Yonah ben Amitai runs away from Ribono shel Olam, only to reveal that his flight becomes the very place where he discovers Him more deeply. Yonah thought he was running away, but in truth he was revealing a deeper kavod (כבוד). The same is true for us.

We feel stuck in desire. We feel hungry and thirsty. These feelings highlight the bodily nature that seems to carry us away from kedushah (קדושה).

Yet even when the body blocks the neshamah, Yom HaKippurim reveals that the body's pain and desire are the very place where the light of HaKadosh Baruch Hu will be revealed, be'ezrat Hashem.

2. The Hidden Pleasure of Yom HaKippurim

Living the Future in the Present

With the help of Hashem (be-ezrat Hashem, בעזרת השם), we continue our series of shiurim (שיעורים), Living the Future in the Present. Although this was not originally planned as part of the series, the approach of Yom Kippur (יום כיפור) calls for attention to one essential point: how the possibility of living the future in the present can shape our avodah (עבודה).

The goal is not merely speculative. It is to uncover something we can actually engage in through the avodah of Yom HaKadosh (יום הקדוש), the singular day of the year that stands outside the ordinary trajectory of calendar time. Yom HaKippurim (יום הכיפורים) comes to us from the future and gives us a taste of the future itself.

The Fast Is Not the Point

On Yom Kippur, we observe the chamishah inuyim (חמישה עינויים), the five forms of physical abstention: no eating, no drinking, no tashmish hamitah (תשמיש המיטה), no sichah (סיכה), and no ne'ilat hasandal (נעילת הסנדל). These five inuyim (עינויים) are commonly understood as a way of weakening the body's hold, allowing the neshamah (נשמה) to

assume its rightful place over the twin camps of the soul, the nefesh habahamit (נפש הבהמית) and the nefesh haElokit (נפש האלוקית). We refuse the demands of the body and thereby elevate the capacity of the soul. The pain of the inui is therefore often seen as a form of kapparah (כפרה), even as the method through which one becomes worthy in judgment on Yom HaKippurim.

But the suffering of the body is certainly not the essence of the day as understood by Chazal (חז"ל). Yom Kippur is not a fast day in the sense that the suffering of fasting is the primary way we enter it. To understand the power of fasting on Yom Kippur, Chazal direct us toward the power of eating on Erev Yom Kippur (ערב יום כיפור).

As Reb Tzadok HaKohen MiLublin explains, Erev Yom Kippur and Yom Kippur itself are two halves of a single whole. We enter one by eating and the other by refraining from food. Their alignment makes clear that the purpose of the day cannot simply be suffering through the absence of food, because everything accomplished through fasting can also be approached through eating.

The Torah HaKedoshah (תורה הקדושה) is teaching us that the day is not ultimately about suffering. It is about doing whatever the day asks of us with intentionality. We must therefore ask: What is the day actually about? What are the inuyim? What does it mean to stop partaking in food, to

allow the body to lie dormant, and to cease engaging it in its ordinary way?

When Affliction Becomes Delight

The Tikkunei Zohar (תיקוני זוהר), in Tikkun Chaf Alef (תיקון כ"א), looks at the inui of Yom HaKippurim and teaches that in the future (le-atid, לעתיד), the pain of the day will undergo a reversal. Inui will be transformed into ta'anug (תענוג), pleasure. It will no longer be only te'anu et nafshoteichem (תענו את נפשתיכם), causing the soul to suffer, but tit'angu et nafshoteichem (תתענגו את נפשתיכם), allowing the soul to find delight.

This accords with another teaching of the Tikkunei Zohar: Yom HaKippurim is ki-Purim (כפורים). The physical pleasure encountered on Purim represents the ideal way of engaging with HaKadosh Baruch Hu (הקדוש ברוך הוא). The prohibition against physical pleasure on Yom HaKippurim is temporary; ideally, we should be capable of discovering ta'anug haguf (תענוג הגוף), the pleasure of the body itself, within our relationship with Hashem.

The tzaddikim (צדיקים), especially the Mitteler Rebbe of Lubavitch, teach that fasting on Yom Kippur can itself be experienced as the pleasure of eating. The verse says, lehachayotam bara'av (להחיותם ברעב), describing how Hashem sustains His people in famine. Ordinarily, we

understand hunger as the negative condition and sustenance as the relief that removes us from it. But the Mittlerer Rebbe reads the words differently: not merely to give them life despite the hunger, but to give them life through the hunger itself.

The hunger, the refraining, and the abstinence from the physical pleasure we desire can themselves become the fullest expression of a pleasure so deep that it cannot be experienced except through the negation of every other pleasure. Just as Hashem is beyond every positive description, because any assertion about what He is would limit Him, the pleasure available on Yom HaKippurim is too deep to be expressed in an ordinary physical form. It can be held only through refraining.

The movement away from partaking becomes a recognition that nothing in this world can satisfy the true hunger of the soul. That recognition is itself the sustenance the soul desires.

Bread That Comes from Elsewhere

This is why Rav Tzadok HaKohen MiLublin points out that all the aggadot (אגדות) concerning the man (מן), the lechem min hashamayim (לחם מן השמים), appear in Masechet Yoma (מסכת יומא). The man is food that is not ordinary food, sustenance that comes from elsewhere. Yoma represents the capacity to partake of a spiritual pleasure that truly nourishes.

According to the Mitteler Rebbe, *lehachayotam bara'av* means that I discover life precisely through not engaging. I am no longer confined to the body's ordinary form of life, in which it must partake as it always has. Instead, I allow myself a taste of the future light, when these physical pleasures will no longer be necessary.

The day is therefore not about suffering. It is about recognizing that we can move slightly beyond the limits we usually assume define us. The more *inui* we feel in the *nefesh* (נפש), the more intense Yom Kippur can become—not because abject suffering is sacred, God forbid, but because the thing we desire is so great that no physical object can come close to satisfying it. Only nothing can contain it.

By refraining from engagement, we descend into the *etzem* (עצם), the essence of the day itself.

A Pleasure Too Great for Any Vessel

At the back of the Mitteler Rebbe's *Ner Mitzvah Ve'Torah Ohr*, Reb Hillel Paritcher, *zechuto yagein aleinu* (זכותו יגן עלינו), offers a profound commentary on *Sha'ar HaYichud* (שער היחוד). In discussing Yom Kippur, he writes: *Ki hinei Yom Kippur nikra Shabbat Shabbaton* (כי הנה יום כיפור נקרא)—Yom Kippur is called the Shabbat of all Shabbatot. It is higher than the dimension of an ordinary Shabbat, on which there is only a taste of the future: *shehu*

lema'alah mibechinat haShabbat shenitgaleh bo me'ein le-atid lavo (שהוא למעלה מבחינת השבת שנתגלה בו מעין לעתיד לבוא).

On Yom Kippur, however, we encounter the future itself. We experience the hidden pleasure bound up with the revelation of Godliness in this world. Vezeh hu al yedei teshuvah me'umka deliba shemagia be'atzmut dafka (וזהו על ידי תשובה): this is reached through teshuvah (תשובה) that rises from the essence of the self, from the depth of the heart. It is vehashiveinu beteshuvah sheleimah lefanecha dafka (והשיבנו בתשובה שלמה לפניך דווקא), reaching beyond even the Divine Name of Havayah (הוי"ה), toward a place that cannot be expressed.

Reb Hillel Paritcher explains that because the day is rooted in the future, we are given a glimpse of the concealed pleasure of seeing HaKadosh Baruch Hu ayin be'ayin (עין בעין), eye to eye. Lachein ne'esar kol minei oneg beYom HaKippurim (לכן): for this very reason, every form of physical pleasure is forbidden on Yom HaKippurim.

The day reveals something of atzmut Ohr Ein Sof (עצמות אור), the essence of the Infinite Light, which is the source of every spiritual and physical pleasure. No lower pleasure can become a vessel for such an influx: lo yuchal limtzo lematah be'oneg hatachton keli lazeh (לא יוכל למצוא למטה בעונג התחתון כלי לזה). The only vessel is ha'inui shehu hefech ha'oneg

(העינוי שהוא היפך העונג)—non-pleasure, the very opposite of ordinary pleasure.

The absence of pleasure becomes the vessel for a future pleasure so deep that we cannot even feel it. The avodah of the tzaddikim is to discover the light of oneg (עונג) within the day of Yom HaKippurim. But the Rebbe, Reb Yitzchak Meir Morgenstern shlita (שליט"א), asks the question that speaks to the rest of us: What about those who cannot taste that future light? What about those who cannot feel the ta'anug haruchani (תענוג הרוחני) that emerges from refraining from the physical?

The Holiness of Feeling Nothing

The Rebbe teaches that when a person cannot find the spiritual awareness of pleasure that comes through refraining—when the person no longer hears the soul more loudly than the body and simply does not feel anything—that person may be entering a place above feeling.

We have spoken many times in our shiurim on the Torah of Rav Yitzchak Meir Morgenstern about unfelt pleasure becoming felt. The practical avodah is this: when a person is caught in unconscious, unfeeling struggle at the very height of the day (be-itzumo shel yom, בעיצומו של יום), and the suffering feels overwhelming, the person closes their eyes and remembers that the future revelation of HaKadosh Baruch

Hu will be so immense and so all-saturating that it will also be beyond feeling. Essence cannot be felt. Only expression can be grasped, held, and experienced.

On Yom Kippur, while tasting that future, I can own the fact that I feel absolutely nothing. I can lean into the fact that I do not feel the pleasure of the day and that all I feel is inui haguf (עינוי הגוף), the affliction of the body. In that absence of feeling, I remind myself that I am touching the essence, which lies beyond ta'am (טעם), beyond taste and beyond experience.

In the moment of difficulty, I can close my eyes and say: Ribbono shel Olam (ריבונו של עולם), I cannot feel Yom Kippur as the tzaddikim feel it. But I know that in the future, reality will be so full and so overflowing with Your light that I will not be able to feel it then either. This is what the tzaddikim call ta'anug hane'elam (תענוג הנעלם), the concealed pleasure that is too great for the body to contain.

Right now, on Yom HaKippurim, I do not feel anything. All I want is not to be fasting; all I want is not to be doing what I am doing. Yet when I lean into that absence of feeling, I draw the light of the future into the present. I encounter a pleasure so deep that I do not even know I am experiencing it.

We are not asked to pretend that we share the avodah of the tzaddikim, or to claim that we enjoy the fast. We are asked to be genuinely human: to feel the difficulty of hunger, the difficulty of the ta'anit (תענית), and the difficulty of

this-worldliness. The lack of experience, taste, and feeling becomes the greatest possible receptacle for a light so infinite, so vast, and so far beyond description that it feels like nothing at all.

The lowercase nothing of Yom Kippur—the experience of feeling nothing—becomes the vessel for the capital N Nothing of the future light of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, which descends into the world at every moment.

When the Future No Longer Needs a Promise

The Rebbe, Reb Yitzchak Meir Morgenstern, points to a tension between the general laws of teshuvah and the particular teshuvah of Yom HaKippurim. According to the Rambam (רמב"ם) and the poskim (פוסקים), teshuvah ordinarily contains three parts: azivat hachet (עזיבת החטא), leaving the wrongful behavior; charatah (חרטה), regretting our engagement in it; and kabbalah le-atid (קבלה לעתיד), accepting upon ourselves that we will refrain from it in the future.

Ordinarily, all three are necessary. On Yom Kippur, however, the first two elements remain clear while the third seems to recede from view. I need azivat hachet. I must leave behind the unwanted behavior and release the baggage I have carried. I also need charatah. I must recognize that what I did is regrettable because it does not express the essence of who I

am. What appears to be absent is the absolute necessity of kabbalah le-atid.

On Yom Kippur, there is no inherent need to define what I will do in the future, because HaKadosh Baruch Hu is bochen levavot (בוֹחֵן לִבָּבוֹת), the One who examines hearts, and on that day the future is already present.

When I decide on Yom Kippur that kirvat Elokim li tov (קִרְבַּת אֱלֹהִים לִי טוֹב), that closeness to Hashem is my good, I say: I want You. I do not want distractions. I do not want Olam HaZeh (עוֹלָם הַזֶּה), Olam HaBa (עוֹלָם הַבָּא), Gan Eden Elyon or Gan Eden Tachton (גֶּן עֵדֶן עֲלִיּוֹן אוֹ תַּחְתּוֹן). I want only You. I want the Kodesh HaKodashim (קֹדֶשׁ הַקֳּדָשִׁים).

This closeness reveals the deepest dimension of the soul, the yechidah shebanefesh (יְחִידָה שֶׁבַנֶּפֶשׁ), the singularity of the self. It is revealed through the singularity of time, Yom Kippur, and the singularity of place, the Kodesh HaKodashim. In that moment, Hashem does not need to look toward what I will do later, because the future is now.

If I decide in that moment that I no longer want to remain as I was, even if I cannot guarantee what will be true tomorrow, the decision is true on Yom Kippur. I do not need to claim that I will never return to what I have done. Right here and right now, past and future fall away. All of history, eternity, and personal experience are folded into this moment. Hashem, who examines the heart, knows that this is true

teshuvah even without an absolute kabbalah le-atid, because every chet (חטא), every chisaron (חיסרון), every transgression, and every failure is circumstantial rather than essential.

The Truth That Exists in One Moment

When I decide on Yom HaKippurim that I want to move toward something different, that desire is the true expression of who I am. If it falls away the next day, that does not erase what I genuinely accepted in the sacred present of Yom HaKippurim.

This truth appears often in the realm of addiction. A person may sit before us, hear every consequence associated with addiction and substance abuse, and say with complete sincerity that they never want to return to their substance of choice. Then they may leave the room, relapse, and return to the very behavior they rejected.

People become frustrated because they assume they were facing a liar—someone who says one thing and then does another. But when dealing with anyone who struggles, it is essential to understand that the person was not necessarily lying. In the moment they said they did not want to return, they truly meant it. If we could examine the heart at that moment, the person would say with complete conviction: Absolutely not. I have kabbalah le-atid.

When the next moment brings another fall, it does not uproot the truth of the previous moment. Circumstances return and carry us away from our mind. Ein adam choteh ella im kein nichnas bo ruach shtut (אין אדם חוטא אלא אם כן) (נכנס בו רוח שטות): a person does not sin unless a spirit of foolishness enters them. We become insane again, but that insanity does not erase the sanity we touched in the deepest moment of the self.

On Yom HaKippurim, the future is present. There is no need for kabbalah le-atid in its usual form because the atid (עתיד), the future, has collapsed into the present itself.

From Hunger to Pleasantness

How, then, do we live that future in the present when we are caught in the difficulty of the fast? How can we do it when the body insists that fasting is the hardest thing in the world, when we imagine that if only we could drink water, or satisfy one physical need, we could finally serve HaKadosh Baruch Hu? How do we reach the future while surrounded by the noise of the body and the demands of the flesh?

The history of holy books offers a remarkable entry into this question. In the sefarim hakedoshim (ספרים הקדושים), everything about a text can be seen as significant: not only its content and author, but also its framework, numbering, arrangement, and printing history. Reb Tzadok HaKohen MiLublin and Reb Yonatan Eybeschutz, in his Kreiti U'Palti (כרתי ופלתי), even interpret the numbering of dapim (דפים) in Gemara and simanim (סימנים) in the Shulchan Aruch. If a tzaddik places himself within a text, the entire form of that text carries meaning.

This brings us to the holy sefer Likkutei Moharan (ליקוטי מוהר"ן). When its teachings were numbered, care was taken not to allow the Hebrew letters of a number to form a negative word. The 272nd teaching should technically be numbered reish ayin beit (רע"ב), letters that evoke ra'av (רעב), hunger or famine. The letters were therefore reordered as ayin reish beit (ער"ב), suggesting areiv (ערב), pleasantness.

The heading itself thus contains a transformation. Ra'av, the hunger and desire of the body, becomes areiv, pleasantness. This is the question of Yom HaKippurim: How do we transform the present condition of ra'avon (רעבון), hunger, into the future orientation of areivut (עריבות), pleasantness?

If the form of the sefer is teaching us something, then the lesson numbered by these transformed letters should reveal how hunger becomes pleasantness and how the future can be tasted in the present. This is precisely what happens.

Nothing Exists Except Today

In the 272nd teaching of Likkutei Moharan, Rebbe Nachman teaches: Hayom im bekolo tishma'u (היום אם בקולו) (תשמעו)—today, if you will listen to His voice. This is a fundamental rule in the service of Hashem: a person must place nothing before themselves except today.

In physical life, I must not place before myself anything beyond today. I need not carry tomorrow or yesterday into the present. The same is true in avodat Hashem (עבודת השם). A person cannot place before themselves anything but today and this moment.

When someone wants to enter the gates of avodat Hashem, the burden can appear impossibly heavy. The future commitment, the kabbalah le-atid of serving Hashem, seems

too large to carry. But when a person thinks only about today and this moment, it is no longer an unbearable burden. Nor can the person procrastinate by saying, “Tomorrow I will begin,” because tomorrow is an entirely new reality.

This is the meaning of hayom im bekolo tishma’u: listen to His voice today—specifically today.

The transformation of reish ayin beit, the letters of hunger, into ayin reish beit, the letters of pleasantness, occurs through presence in the moment itself. The pain of the body's negation becomes the pleasantness of feeling nothing and realizing that this nothingness can be the deepest expression of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. The future light is too great for any physical vessel, and it can therefore be held only here, in the unadorned reality of the present moment.

One Moment in the Kodesh HaKodashim

Yom HaKippurim is long, and its tefillot (תפילות) are long. Our task is to center ourselves in one moment after another.

Hineni (הנני), Ribbono shel Olam: I am here before You now. Do I want to be here? Sometimes yes and sometimes no. At one moment I may feel like the most fortunate person in the world, and at another like the least fortunate. But I am here with You now. Whether I am lying in bed because I do not

feel well or standing before You in shul (שול), I am here with You, Ribbono shel Olam.

In every moment of Yom HaKippurim, we can close our eyes, quiet the noise, release the distractions, and identify for one moment with the innermost point of the self—the Kodesh HaKodashim within us.

The day surrounds that single moment with an entire drama of distraction. We distract the Satan (שטן) throughout the day. The remembered avodah of the Beit HaMikdash (בית המקדש), the korbanot (קרבנות), the Sa'ir LaAzazel (שעיר לעזאזל), and the Al Chet (על חטא) all form the great stage of the day, holding back the negative forces that threaten to overwhelm us and make us lose hope.

All of it clears a path toward one singular point: one moment in the Kodesh HaKodashim with the Ribbono shel Olam. It is one moment in which the innermost point of the heart meets the innermost point of reality and touches what I truly want.

I may not be able to name what I want. There may be no words or vessels capable of containing it. But I know I am touching it when I can close my eyes and allow myself one moment of vulnerability.

That is the tachlit (תכלית): to be here now, moving through incremental moments—achat, achat ve'achet, achat

veshtayim, achat veshalosh (אחת, אחת ואחת, אחת ושתיים, אחת) (ושלש)—one after another, one foot in front of the other. There is no expectation of grandiosity, no demand for hasagot (השגות) or giluyim (גילויים). That is not why we serve HaKadosh Baruch Hu. We ask only for one moment of connection: Achat sha'alti me'et Hashem, otah avakesh; shivti bevit Hashem kol yemei chayai, lachazot beno'am Hashem ulevaker beheichalo (אחת שאלתי מאת ה' אותה אבקש שבתי בבית) (ה' כל ימי חיי לחזות בנעם ה' ולבקר בהיכלו).

The Future Arrives in This Moment

In that single moment of connection, even if I feel nothing—mamash (ממש) nothing—I can close my eyes and understand that this is exactly what the Ribbono shel Olam wants from me. He wants me to be here now. And that is what we want from HaKadosh Baruch Hu as well: that He be here now for us.

When we move through the distractions and arrive at that point, the ra'avon, the hunger of reish ayin beit, is transformed into the areivut, the pleasantness of ayin reish beit. That pleasantness carries us toward the simchah (שמחה) of Sukkot (סוכות) and allows us to begin, truly, to taste the future in the present moment, with the help of Hashem.

3. Beyond Shame on Yom HaKippurim

The Day That Reveals Who We Are

Yom HaKippurim (יום הכיפורים) is the holy day, the day of purity (טהרה), the day of Mikveh Yisrael Hashem (מקוה ישראל). It draws us toward a place beyond ordinary knowledge, toward the mystery hinted at in the name Yom HaKippurim: a day that is like Purim. On Yom HaKippurim we approach this state through comparison, through the chaf hadimyon; on Purim, it is experienced in the fullness of ad delo yada, beyond knowing.

To enter this day, we must first confront one of the deepest obstacles to teshuvah (תשובה): the confusion between guilt and shame. Guilt allows me to look at an action, a thought, or a way I have expressed myself and acknowledge that it was wrong. I accept responsibility for it. I repair what I can, accept what cannot be undone, and submit myself to whatever process of correction is required. Yet even while I take the act seriously, I know that it does not define the fabric of my being or the innermost texture of my soul.

Shame is different. Shame creates a tishvush, a blurring that breaks down the boundary between the subjective core of the self and the objective expression of behavior. The act is no

longer something I did; it becomes who I am. The mistake no longer belongs to me as something that can be acknowledged, carried, repaired, or released. It becomes identical with me.

Once action and identity merge, change begins to feel impossible. If the deed expresses the unchangeable core of who I am, then changing the deed would require changing my very self. I cannot imagine doing that, so I hide the action. I refuse to look at it because it seems to reveal that my core is bad. This is toxic shame: the inability to distinguish between the person who acted and the action itself, between the speaker and the word, between the thinker and the thought.

The Paralysis of Shame

When a person identifies with the dirt, the lichluch (לכלוך), and the accumulated weight of failure, shame produces paralysis. The person does not even begin to release the behavior because the behavior seems to be the self. Guilt says, “I am not bad; I have done something wrong.” Shame says, “The wrong is me.”

Healthy guilt leaves room for the inherent goodness of the person to rise and overcome what was done wrong, al kol pesha'im techaseh ahavah (על כל פשעים תכסה אהבה). Shame closes that room. Letting go of the wrongdoing feels like surrendering an essential part of oneself, and the person

remains trapped in a self-fulfilling conviction that change is impossible.

This is why shame can become a strange and destructive refuge. It repeats, “I am so bad that I cannot change,” until self-loathing becomes an excuse for inaction. The person appears to be confronting the failure with great intensity, yet the intensity itself protects the failure from genuine examination. If I am entirely bad, there is nothing specific to identify and nothing practical to repair.

A central movement of Yom HaKippurim is the ascent out of this prison. The day pulls us away from the intoxicated perspective that equates the self with its actions and returns us to healthy guilt. From that place, I can examine my actions, thoughts, patterns of speech, triggers, and choices. I can determine where effort is needed and what must be removed from my life. I can do so because I am no longer approaching the broken act as a broken self.

This distance is the secret of *hachna'ah*, *havdalah*, and *hamtakah* (הכנעה הבדלה המתקה): submission, separation, and sweetening. I make the problem smaller than the totality of who I am. I separate my identity from the deed. Only then can I begin to transform and sweeten what has gone wrong.

Regret That Leaves a Person Unchanged

The Piaseczna Rebbe, Hashem yikom damo, exposes this hidden refuge in Tzav Veziruz. His private writings emerged from the heart of a tzaddik and speak across generations precisely because they were not composed for an audience. In the Warsaw Ghetto, within a hell on earth, he continued to draw Gan Eden into that darkness.

The Piaseczna Rebbe interprets the teaching resha'im mele'im charatot (רשעים מלאים חרטות), "the wicked are filled with regrets." How can a person remain a rasha while being filled with regret? In the context of our discussion, the answer lies in the difference between transformative regret and the emotional eruption of shame.

Human beings cannot sustain an intensely beating, emotionally overwhelmed heart for very long. A powerful feeling rises, fills the person, and then dissipates. Shame arrives with a visceral cry: "How could I be so bad?" While it burns, the person feels miserable. When it fades, its absence is mistaken for healing. The person feels that work has been done simply because the emotional pain is no longer as sharp.

But nothing has necessarily changed. The behavior has not been examined, the pattern has not been interrupted, and no practical step has been taken. The person has endured an emotional storm and then returned to the same holding

pattern. Shame therefore enables the very behavior it appears to condemn. It convinces the person that change is impossible, creates an overwhelming burst of self-loathing, and then offers relief when that burst passes.

Healthy guilt has a quieter endurance. It can say, “There is something I need to do now.” Because it does not annihilate the self, it can remain present long enough to guide action. The person can rise, take responsibility, and begin loosening the pattern that has held him. In this sense, the charatah of the wicked is the shame that allows wickedness to continue, while genuine charatah leads toward repair.

Vidui Without Self Destruction

Yom HaKippurim frees us from the yetzer hara of shame. Shame entered human consciousness after the sin of the Etz HaDa’at, when the distinction between etzem (עצם), the essential self before expression, and hitpashtut (התפשטות), the self as it unfolds into expression, became obscured. The yetzer hara continually presses us to identify with our misdeeds rather than with the goodness beneath them.

On Yom HaKippurim, we can speak openly and repeatedly about what we have done because the day restores the distinction between self and action. Only a person who knows that an action does not define his essence can look directly at it and say, “This was wrong. This must be repaired.

This is where I must work.” A person trapped in shame cannot itemize his failures without feeling that each admission cuts away a piece of his being.

The ability to say vidui (וידוי), to pronounce ashamnu, bagadnu (אשמונו בגדנו), therefore rests upon a deeper confidence. The deed is wrong. There is responsibility, law, consequence, and a process of return. Yet the deed does not define the one who confesses it. At the core of the soul remains a connection to HaKadosh Baruch Hu that no failure can erase.

Only when I know that I am not what I do can I look honestly at what I do. Only then can confession become an act of courage rather than an act of self-destruction. Yom HaKippurim reveals the innermost point of the Jewish heart and gives us the ground from which real teshuvah becomes possible.

The Light of Keter Within the Heart

Yom HaKippurim belongs to binah (בינה), the world of the heart, understanding, and teshuvah. Yet the day is more than the revelation of binah. It is the revelation of the highest light of Keter (כתר) within the vessels of binah. This reaches its final expression at Ne'ilah, when we declare Hashem Hu HaElokim (ה' הוא האלוקים). Hashem, the boundless light of

the Or Ein Sof, is revealed precisely within the limitation associated with Elokim.

What is revealed in the heart of every Jew is the inner point of the heart, the re'uta deliba (רעותא דליבא), the heart's truest desire. This is the yechidah shebanefesh (יחידה שבנפש), the singular point of the soul; the point of the Kohen Gadol within each person, entering the Kodesh HaKodashim (קודש הקדשים) within each person, on the day of Yom HaKippurim within each person.

The self is layered. The Zohar HaKadosh, the Arizal, the Ba'al Shem Tov, the Gra, and the tzaddikim describe five levels of soul, each clothed within the next. The nefesh (נפש) is bound to the body and to the lived, physical sense of being in the world. The ruach (רוח) belongs to the heart and the movement of emotion. The neshamah (נשמה) is associated with mind, thought, and the ideals by which we try to govern emotion.

On each of these levels, we struggle. The body is bruised and exhausted. The heart is pulled by anxiety, sadness, insecurity, obsessive thought, and rumination. It moves from world to world in a moment. The doubled heart, lev and lev, gives birth to bilbul (בלבול), confusion. The avodah of teshuvah is to give the heart completely to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, yet thought, speech, and action—machshavah, dibbur, and

ma'aseh (מחשבה דיבור ומעשה)—remain vulnerable to fluctuation and failure.

If I identify only with nefesh, ruach, and neshamah, I will imagine that no stable self exists beneath change. I will feel close to Hashem when my garments are clean and far from Him when they are stained. My levushim (לבושים), the ways I express myself through thought, speech, and action, will seem to define me.

These levels demand serious work. A person must scrub and refine them in order to become a faithful shaliach of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Every mitzvah is a precious opportunity, and every movement toward psychological, emotional, physical, or spiritual health is worth the journey of a lifetime. The responsibility is immense. But these garments still do not define the essence.

The Point Beyond Every Garment

Beyond the three inner garments stands chayah (חיה), the surrounding vitality, the breath of a life greater than conscious selfhood. It is associated with chochmah, with the light that approaches, recedes, and approaches again. Yet even this level can be drawn into confusion when it is not received properly. A person can question his worthiness even within spiritual vitality. The force of shame can reach toward the

concealed mind, the place of mocha stima'ah and botzina dekardinuta, and turn even a refined experience into doubt.

Beyond all of these is the yechidah. It is the innermost interiority of the soul, a point that cannot express itself except through its concealment. It has no garment. It is revealed in the solitude of the Kodesh HaKodashim, in bad kodesh yilbash, in badad yeshev, in the place where the human yechidah encounters, as it were, the yechidah of HaKadosh Baruch Hu—yechidah leYachidcha.

In that place there is no pollution. The etzem hanefesh (עצם הנפש), the essence of the soul, cannot be grasped, defined, measured, or turned into a theme. The moment we try to make it an object that can be possessed and described, we have already reduced it into another garment.

To touch this point is to say: “Ribono shel Olam, I do not know how or why I can believe this. My actions may appear to testify against it. Nevertheless, I am willing to give my life for the belief that there is a point of goodness within me that nothing can reach except You.” This point bears no stain. It is the inner desire of the heart, forever bound to the Or Ein Sof, not because we are sufficiently righteous or worthy, but because it is a chelek Elokaḥ mima'al mamash.

HaKadosh Baruch Hu knows the reason for creation. Even when the tzaddikim offer reasons, they know that ultimately only He knows the beginning, the middle, and the end. We

know nothing. The vessel through which we approach the yechidah is therefore mesirut nefesh (מסירות נפש): the willingness to live by the faith that, at the innermost point, tov ani be'ainav, I am good in His eyes.

I may not know how, when, where, or why, but I know that this inner bond is above connection and disconnection. It simply is. In the radical acceptance of the soul's essential purity, I become able to rise again. I am released from shame because I discover that the deepest point of my will has always desired to fulfill the will of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. As the Rambam explains through kofin oto ad sheyomar rotzeh ani, beneath the forces that obstruct a Jew stands the will that says, "I want."

The Essential Self Was Never in the Sin

Our cravings, sadness, anxiety, hunger for affirmation, and pursuit of honor arise from living apart from the yechidah shebanefesh, from the innermost deveikut with HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Within the Kodesh HaKodashim of lo yada (לא ידע), all inessential garments fall away. There it is revealed that our struggles were never fully deliberate because full deliberateness would require the participation of all five levels of the soul. The fifth and deepest level was never contained in the sin.

Throughout the year, we judge ourselves through body, emotion, mind, and even spiritual aspiration. We say, “I did this knowingly. This reveals exactly who I am.” That conclusion forces us into the posture of shame. But when the yechidah is uncovered, it becomes clear retroactively that no deed ever expressed every part of the self. The essential point remained silent in the hiddenness of the soul.

This is the sefer concealed within concealment, the secret of lo yada. “HaKadosh Baruch Hu, I do not know how or why, but I give myself over to the belief of ki lecha haselichah (כי לך הסליחה), that forgiveness belongs to You. This innermost place was not involved. At my core, I desire closeness to You.”

Only after this encounter can we enter ashamnu, bagadnu, gazalnu, dibarnu dofi. If I assume that the deepest self participated in every failure, correction becomes impossible. How can I repair what is essential? When I know that the essential self was present but never contained within the fallen garments, I can separate myself from the paralysis of shame and face the deed through healthy guilt.

Kol Nidrei and the Claim of Shegagah

This is why Yom HaKippurim begins with Kol Nidrei, before the repeated confessions and the accounting of the soul. At the threshold of the day we declare *ki lechol ha'am bishgagah* (כי לכל העם בשגגה): the entire people acted through error.

This does not deny responsibility. On the bodily, emotional, cognitive, and even spiritual levels, we remain responsible to repair what we have damaged. But on the level of the *yechidah shebanefesh*, the act was *bishgagah*. The *yechidah* never entered the sin. It was never stained, never polluted, and never severed.

Why, then, do we not feel it? Because its revelation takes the form of concealment. The *yechidah* cannot become an ordinary experience. Once we give it a fixed name and form, it has become another *gilui*, another garment, and is once again vulnerable to the language of shame. The unshameable singularity of the self can be known only as the singularity of the self. Each person knows it intuitively without possessing it intellectually.

We are not charged with knowing the *yechidah*. We are charged with believing in it and giving ourselves over to that belief. From there we can say that our failure was not deliberate in the total sense. HaKadosh Baruch Hu placed us in a world of concealment, fluctuation, and descent. As

creatures, we inevitably struggle. We are not the Creator. The defining human condition is that we make mistakes.

The malachim cannot understand this power. On Yom HaKippurim we may dress, pray, and stand like angels, but the heart of the day is the distinctly human confession: “I made a mistake. You concealed my yechidah from me. Reveal it to me.” The Shpoler Zeide expressed this argument before Heaven: You have revealed the yetzer hara and concealed Yourself; reveal Yourself and conceal the yetzer hara, and see how readily Klal Yisrael will fulfill Your will.

The Hunger That Feeds the Soul

The Rebbe Rashab describes the revelation of Yom HaKippurim as the he'elem ha'atzmi (העלם העצמי), the essential concealment of the Or Ein Sof that will be revealed in the future. The essence of HaKadosh Baruch Hu can never become an object of our grasp. Even the essential Name is a revelation of an Essence that remains beyond the Name. Its highest revelation is therefore concealment itself: not concealment because something has not yet appeared, but concealment because its very nature exceeds all grasp.

We express this through fasting. We refrain from food not as punishment, but because the pleasure we seek cannot be received through the body. We renounce the attempt to satisfy spiritual longing with a pleasure we already

understand. Yom HaKippurim is lehachayotam bara'av (להחיותם ברעב), sustaining them through hunger. The hunger itself becomes nourishment.

The yearning, the cheshek (חשק), the hishtokekut, and the innermost will reveal a point that can appear only through silence, modesty, and concealment. As we remove the garments of ordinary gratification, we approach the recognition that the deepest part of the self was never fully revealed in this world and therefore was never fully implicated in its failures.

We remain responsible on the revealed levels, but on the fifth level we are always pure. The five tefillot and the five inuyim of the day awaken this inner point, the kutzo shel yud, the spark of Mashiach within every Jew, the da'at of Moshe Rabbeinu revealed in the Kodesh HaKodashim.

Chosen Beyond Reason

This is also the secret of the goral (גורל). HaKadosh Baruch Hu chooses me not because of what I have accomplished with my nefesh, ruach, neshamah, or even chayah. He chooses me through the yechidah, beyond reason, beli ta'am vada'at. The two goats of Yom HaKippurim are externally identical. Their distinction is not based on an observable superiority in one over the other. Precisely there, where reason cannot establish the difference, the deepest distinction emerges.

If Hashem's love depended on the cleanliness of my garments, it would be ahavah hateluyah bedavar, love dependent on a condition. The same garments could later become stained. But Hashem loves me because He loves me. He forgives because forgiveness is His. No accumulation of merit could ever earn even a spark of Yom HaKippurim.

The day is goral laHashem (גורל לה'), the secret of Purim and of mikreh, the apparent chance through which the absolute precision of Divine governance is revealed. I do not become good because I have successfully convinced myself of my goodness, nor contrite because I have measured the intensity of my regret. HaKadosh Baruch Hu alone sees the yechidah shebanefesh and loves it without condition.

That recognition releases me from toxic shame and returns me to the work of ashamnu, bagadnu. On the levels of lived and knowable experience, I must repair. Yet none of those failures can touch the yechidah. In the mikveh, in mayim bemayim, the soul returns to an irreducible purity. The spark of Mashiach emerges within the heart of every Jew, not because we earned it, but because nothing we do can pollute it.

Responsibility Born From Innocence

To call ourselves shogeg does not release us from responsibility. A shogeg must face what happened. The recognition of shegagah gives us the strength to do so because it prevents the failure from swallowing the whole identity.

Within the concealment itself lies the unfolding of HaKadosh Baruch Hu's will for each soul. The Sod Yesharim teaches that, within shegagah, a profound da'at can eventually be found. After a fall, we may discover how our experiences became part of the path through which HaKadosh Baruch Hu was revealed more deeply. This must never become the consciousness that permits a fall beforehand. It is the consciousness of teshuvah after the fall, when the garments have become soiled and the person needs a way to rise.

The mind of teshuvah uncovers the hidden yechidah. Like the chelbenah within the ketoret, even the place associated with an unpleasant odor can be gathered into a fragrance that cannot finally be ruined. Shegagah therefore does not weaken responsibility. It supplies the courage to change what can be changed because I no longer identify my essence with the thing that requires change.

Rebbe Nachman describes shogeg as a condition of translation. A person moves through darkness, uncertain whether he stands in clarified lashon hakodesh, in targum, or

in the obscurity of foreign speech. He searches for the remaining sparks of meaning and slowly translates experience back toward its holy source. This translation is the work of teshuvah: discovering how to move through one's history without allowing negative traits and fallen expressions to define the self.

The rule that the yechidah was not involved applies to negativity. When a person thinks well, acts well, experiences holy emotion, or lives with a refined quality, that goodness reveals an alignment between the lower levels of self and the will of the yechidah. It is not the yechidah itself, but it is its illumination within the garments.

What Hashem Forgets and What He Remembers

The Maharal's interpretation of the Gemara gives this distinction extraordinary force. Klal Yisrael fears that HaKadosh Baruch Hu will never forget the sin of the golden calf. Hashem answers that He will forget it. When Klal Yisrael hears that forgetting is possible, another fear arises: perhaps He will also forget Matan Torah, the love, covenant, and closeness revealed at Sinai.

HaKadosh Baruch Hu answers that He will remember Sinai. The egel can be forgotten because it is not the etzem. It belongs to the garments, to the fallen expressions of nefesh, ruach, neshamah, and even, on some level, chayah. Matan

Torah cannot be forgotten because it reveals the yechidah shebanefesh. It is essential rather than contingent.

On Yom HaKippurim, we identify with that essential self. Our willingness to refrain from food and ordinary desire expresses retzoneinu la'asot retzonecha, our innermost will to do His will. The fast becomes mesirut nefesh befo'al mamash, self-surrender within the body itself. As the fast becomes difficult, the body reveals the irreducible goodness of the Jewish soul.

The sins and errors can then be cast into the water, into mayim bemayim, because they no longer define the one releasing them. The person can finally say: "The innermost point of my soul cannot be fully expressed in this world. My yechidah remains concealed, and therefore my behaviors never contained the whole of me." Through teshuvah, the person may later discover how even the journey through error was gathered into the path of return.

A World Without Complete Intention

Reb Tzadok, in the opening teaching of Resisei Laylah, describes the condition of the human being as a life without full access to the self. The best and deepest part remains concealed, and we therefore wander without complete kavanah or kivun. We need a walking stick and a map because this world resembles a dark path.

This is the meaning of *veha'olam hazeh kulo tirdah*: this world is disturbance. *Tirdah* is the opposite of settled intention because the levels of self do not stand in full alignment. When the *yeichidah* is unrevealed, *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshamah* appear to be competing selves. Their conflict is the disturbance of human life.

Chazal describe departure from this world as rest from *tirdah*. They also preserve the startling confession *ana min yoma lo kavanit*, that even the holy *Tanna'im* could speak of never attaining complete intention. *Tirdah hu hefech hakavanah*: disturbance is the opposite of intention. Complete *kavanah* is impossible while the full self remains concealed.

Therefore, *ki lechol ha'am bishgagah*. If I could not bring the whole self into an action, then the whole self did not perform it. A point remained outside. This does not eliminate obligation on the revealed levels; it prevents the obligation from becoming a verdict on the soul's essence.

Yom HaKippurim and the Knowledge of Not Knowing

At the end of *Divrei Soferim*, Rav Tzadok connects this teaching to Purim. *Tikkunei Zohar* calls Yom HaKippurim a day like Purim, which means that the lower is compared to the higher. Yom HaKippurim belongs to the world of *binah* and *teshuvah*, where HaKadosh Baruch Hu forgave the sin of

the calf and revealed that He forgets the inessential while remembering the essential. Purim rises into *ad delo yada*, beyond the distinction between *arur Haman* and *baruch Mordechai*.

In the state of *lo yada*, I no longer claim complete knowledge of which part of my life expressed me and which part concealed me. I know only that the *yeichidah* exists beyond my grasp. Everything else is *shegagah* because I never possessed complete *kavanah*. On Purim, this is revealed through intoxication. On Yom HaKippurim, it is revealed through the sober knowledge that I do not know.

On the ordinary levels of human life, *da'at* must distinguish between good and evil, holy and ordinary. We need responsibility and *havdalah*. But at the level of the *yeichidah*, the perfection of knowledge is *tachlit hayedi'ah shelo neda* (תכלית הידיעה שלא נדע), the recognition of the limit of knowledge. By acknowledging *chisaron hada'at*, the absence of complete knowledge and intention, a person opens the way toward the deepest acquisition of *da'at*.

This is the joy of Purim and the purity of Yom HaKippurim. Beneath the actions that can be judged, corrected, and separated stands a self that cannot be reduced to any of them. The soul is more interior than its history.

The Desire That Counts as an Offering

The first condition for forgiveness is the recognition that I am not what I have done. If I am identical with my actions, I can never release them. But when I move through hachna'ah, havdalah, and hamtakah, the soul can shine in its singular purity.

The Maggid of Mezritch teaches in Ohr Torah that when a time comes in which human beings possess a great desire to know HaKadosh Baruch Hu and cleave to Him, that desire itself will be accepted like an olah and like all the pure intentions. Ki vi chashak: the yearning itself becomes the offering.

The cheshek of the yechidah may not yet have found expression in the rest of the person. Nevertheless, redemption begins there. The tiny, irreducible point of the soul is the place where Mashiach is revealed within the heart. Even when there is no clear intention, when a person knows nothing and lives in pain and confusion, he can still serve HaKadosh Baruch Hu through cheshek, through the yearning to reach what he cannot yet grasp.

This yearning rests upon faith in nishmat Yisrael and in the secret of goral laHashem. HaKadosh Baruch Hu says, Ahavti etchem (אהבתי אתכם), "I have loved you." We ask, Bameh ahavtanu, "How have You loved us?" On the revealed levels, Yaakov and Esav can appear alike. Yet HaKadosh Baruch Hu

answers, Ve'ohav et Yaakov, ve'et Esav saneiti. The distinction does not arise from what reason can measure. Rav Tzadok explains that its root is reisha delo ityada, the unknowable source of the yechidah.

To accept ki lechol ha'am bishgagah is therefore to uncover ein shum ye'ush (אין שום ייאוש). On the levels of the garments, a person may be commanded not to despair. Within the yechidah, a deeper truth is revealed: there is no despair at all. Even when a person has despaired, the essential point has not.

The avodah of the Kohen Gadol draws the highest light of the Kodesh HaKodashim toward this concealed point. HaKadosh Baruch Hu releases the person from the garments of exile and from the shame that clings to them. The fasting, the affliction, and the surrender of ordinary desire reveal the cheshek of the yechidah shebanefesh: all it wants is HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

From that desire comes the joy of release, ki vesimchah teitzei'u. Yom HaKippurim leads toward the illumination of Sukkot, toward living between heaven and earth, where the concealed singularity of the soul begins to enter the whole of life. The day does not tell us that our actions do not matter. It reveals the self from which we can finally face them. It frees us from shame so that guilt can become responsibility, responsibility can become teshuvah, and teshuvah can uncover the desire that was present within us all along.

4. To Find Hashem Within Concealment

The Avodah of Bringing Malchut Back to Binah on Yom HaKippurim

Be'ezrat Hashem, our aim is to bring the ideas down to the ground: to form a picture of what Yom HaKippurim is, what we are trying to do on this day, and what is taking place within it. To reach that point responsibly, we must first pass through the necessary hakdamot. The writings of the Arizal are themselves known as Hakdamot HaArizal and Sha'ar HaHakdamot. So much of this Torah is called an introduction.

Everything Is an Introduction (הקדמה)

The question is: What exactly is an introduction if it's actually the body of the material itself? The Arizal is not introducing ideas; the Arizal is describing the entirety of the idea, and yet it's still referred to as an introduction. And the way that the tzaddikim interpret this notion is that when it comes to pnimiyut HaTorah, when it comes to understanding the inner framework through which time, space, and self is being experienced, everything is really just a hakdamah. You can learn all that you can possibly read, you can try to understand, contemplate, and meditate on all of

the information available, but at the end of the day, if a person feels that they have graduated from the level of hakdamot, of introductions, so then they're already in dangerous territories. Because we don't get to know anything.

We don't get to ultimately lay claim to wisdom. What we get to do is live with the hakdamot that the tzaddikim revealed to us, these gates. And eventually, somehow, someday, by knocking on those gates and relearning those introductions over and over, there comes a time where a person actually feels something. It's like the Kotzker Rebbe said that in Shema we say vehayu hadevarim al levavecha, that the words should be upon your heart.

And all of the meforshim ask, shouldn't the words be inside of the heart? We want the words to penetrate the heart, we want the words to have an impact on how we function. And so why are we asking Hashem to allow the words to pile up on top of the heart without entry? And the heilige Kotzker said that the heart is closed most of the time. But if you pile up and pile up and pile up, then perhaps in a moment of opening, then a little bit is going to fall in. And this could be what the Kotzker Rebbe means when he said there's nothing as whole as a broken heart.

The Infinite and the Finite

When the heart is broken, the words can seep in. We therefore return to the hakdamot, even when much of them is already familiar. As the Ramchal teaches, what remains for us to learn is often precisely what we already know but have forgotten through familiarity. We return to the basic principles. HaKadosh Baruch Hu created the world through a system of mechanisms. Hashem could have created the world without a system, but He chose an ordered way in which to reveal Himself within it.

Piping, as it were, a seder hahishtalshelut, an order of unfolding, meaning there's a system to it. That's the chiddush of Kabbalah, that it's a system. Because theoretically, Kabbalah is coming to ask a question: How does the infinite relate to the finite? How does the invisible alrightness of God actually mean something within the brokenness of this worldly reality? That's the question. How do we grapple with infinitude on the one hand, and all of the synonyms that come with that, and finite nature, and all of the synonyms that come with that? And so the question of pnimiyut HaTorah is ultimately: What is the bridge that enables there to be a reasonable connection between these two points? Now there are many philosophical systems that have an easy answer, but what happens is you kill one of the options.

Either you deny the infinitude of everything, and then you focus primarily on that which is finite, or you ignore the finite and you are rooted entirely in the infinite, both of which are not true, because you need both at the same time. And so what the Arizal did for us, based on Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, based on Moshe Rabbeinu, is give us a system that is not really a system. It's a system that's not one. It's an order and processes and stages and pipelines and configurations and points of connection and relationships between various parts that serve to be the mediation, the middle passage that allows the infinite and the finite to connect.

But the secret is that this whole system can't really be a real system because we're dealing with the infinite, but nevertheless it continues to be a system. And that's the chiddush of the Arizal. What the Arizal gives us in Etz Chaim is literally a book that's theoretically written in invisible ink, because you're dealing with the infinite. And all the Arizal is describing is the stages in which the infinite gets reduced so that it can express itself in finite, but it doesn't lose its infinite nature.

The Ten Sefirot (עשר ספירות)

So you begin to pay attention and say all of these systems and parts, and these valves of connection and disconnection are less real than they actually appear to be, because all we're talking about at the end of the day is the infinite, but nevertheless, the system remains the system. And because the Arizal revealed it to us, when we learn those words, we are awakening that which is taking place on high. So the mechanisms, the basic tools, as it were, that HaKadosh Baruch Hu used to create the world before the Arizal, were referred to as sfirot. The 10 sfirot.

Sfirot come etymologically from the language of mispar, a number, because numeration implies a certain systematicity, minimization, measure, boundary. Sfirah also comes from the language of sapir, like a sapphire, something that shines and illuminates. It also comes from the language of a sipur, a narrative, a story. It also comes from sefer, from a book.

All of these are ideas that the Sefer Yetzirah is already dealing with in terms of what are these sfirot. But for a long time, we assumed that the basic building blocks of reality were the 10 sfirot. And the way that the 10 sfirot operate is that there's an upper triad of three, and then a singular line of seven. So there are three and seven—two groupings that compose the order of the sfirot.

The first grouping is the upper three, which are referred to as the three heads, and the lower seven that compose the 10 are going to be considered the seven lower *sfirot*, referred to in kabbalistic parlance as GAR, which means Gimel Rishonot, the first three heads, and ZAT, which means Zayin Tachtonot. So these two quadrants, these two families of *sfirot*, compose this system, the sefirotic tree, as it were, that enables the infinite light to trickle down into finitude without overwhelming the finite. Now, these 10 *sfirot* remain fundamental in the sense that each and every one of them represents a different expression, a different vessel through which HaKadosh Baruch Hu, through which God decided to reveal Himself. The *sfirot* are not God.

Heaven forbid to come to think that the *sfirot* are God. The essence of God, as it were, expresses itself and engarbs itself within these constrictive devices called the *sfirot*, which enable that light to come into manageability, but they are not to be identified with God, ever. We have to always, before opening the book, while the book is open, and after closing the book, we have to always remember that we are talking about God's revelations, God's infinite light, God's infinite name, but we are never laying claim to grasp the essence of God Himself, God forbid, where any language or thought, or distinction, or distortion is tantamount to heresy, because it's already a limitation. So hidden within that first principle that we're never actually talking about the infinite itself, we're protected, and we don't fall so much into the mistakes.

This is what the Ramak did. He sanitized Kabbalah so that we don't get stuck in all of this, strange anthropomorphic heresy. But each of these different sfirot, they're not God, but they represent 10 different points, nodal points within a system that express a different valence of Godliness, a different shape of Godliness, a different expression, a different light, a different hue, like different tinted colors of glass through which the sun shines and in accordance with the nature of the glass, so too is the sunshine going to be illuminated, or 10 different shapes of a vessel that water can get poured into, and water is going to appear in different ways based on what that vessel is, but it's a singular body of water and it's a singular element of light, it's not changing. And these 10 sfirot represent 10 different modes through which Hashem reveals Himself.

Now, the three rashim, the three heads, we refer to as Keter, Chochmah, and Binah. And the Zayin Tachtanot are Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Netzach, Hod, Yesod, and Malchut. And just again, like we're reintroducing ourselves over and over. But again, we're new people every second, so when we encounter these ideas, it's new to us each and every time.

The great tzaddikim, the Gra, the Ba'al Shem Tov, ultimately come to the world to teach the alef-beit. But the Gra stood up for his rebbe who taught him the alef-beit, not as a joke, but he truly understood that he had come to realize that all of my

study is nothing other than the alef-beit. It's always returning back to the alef-beit. The Ba'al Shem Tov HaKadosh had to remember the alef-beit in order to be saved on the Shvi'i shel Pesach.

From Idealism into Experience

It all comes back to basic, simple principles. And so when we look at the Gimel Rishonot, so these two categories of the sfirot, there's the upper three and the lower seven, the upper three are seen as representing a state of idealism, a purified space that is unpolluted by this-worldliness, the notion of this-worldliness, the questions of existence, the existential questions of this-worldly encounter. They are ideals, as it were. They are principles that operate in a real way, but not in a way that we have a tangible grasp of, and therefore they do not become polluted.

They are purified ideals that remain true no matter what point of reference we have. Keter represents the emergence, and we're going to use, let's use an anthropomorphic understanding of how a person, let's say God, wanted to build a house. So let's look at the Sefirot through the process of the architectural development of wanting to build a house. Keter is the will that arises within the mind of the dreamer when it says, "I have a desire to have a dwelling place for myself.

I desire something." Now that desire is rooted in an expectation of pleasure that's going to come about when I actualize this desire. But Keter, the initial point of will, is awoken from a future pleasure that I see as taking place when I finalize the mission. So Keter is the emergence of the will, and at that point in Keter, it's diffuse. I don't know exactly how something is going to look.

I have a broad dream, a sense. Chochmah, the right brain, is a sudden emergent burst of insight that holds so much together in a thunderbolt of information, but due to its intensity and the speed through which it's expressed, it lacks differentiation. It lacks particularization. It doesn't have details.

It doesn't yet know how it's going to unfold. It knows the general picture of what the house is going to look like, how I idealize the house, but it's still removed from practicality. Then comes Binah, which is the left brain, which is a severe form of thought which separates that original whole of Chochmah, and it breaks it down into bite-sized pieces of information that can be extrapolated one from the other so that this big dream actually becomes a formidable plan.

Then, because the upper three Sefirot are so idealized, and the lower seven Sefirot are so reality-based, as we're going to see, there needs to be a hidden bridge, 'cause there's no direct conversation between those two levels.

And so that hidden bridge is called Da'at, which is knowledge. It's like the neck, which is, okay, now that I've had a desire arise within my mind, and an initial burst of thought as to how this is going to unfold, and I've even gone through the separation and the particularization of my thinking to see how it's going to take shape, Da'at is now, how do I draw all of this intellectualism and the stuff of the mind into a lived experience, into the next stage of expression, which is the visceral territory of emotional experience and ultimately physical experience? So then we come to the Zayin Tachtonot. And the Zayin Tachtonot, the lower seven Sefirot, are very separate, very separate from the upper three Sefirot. If the upper three Sefirot are unbroken and purified and refined, and ideals that one can tap into no matter how non-ideal their life might seem—a place to run to, a place to dream in, a place to be comfortable—the Zayin Tachtonot are post-traumatic.

They've broken already. They're susceptible to change. They're more identifiable with lived viscosity of the emotional experience. Emotions are as real as thoughts are. They're just a different framework of the mind. The heart does not control our emotions.

The reason that, medieval philosophers assumed that the heart was the seat of emotions while the brain was the seat of thinking was just 'cause thinking and emotions are so far from each other that it was nearly impossible to assume that

they came from the same place. But now, thankfully, neurobiology and psychoneurobiology have come to a place of realizing, wow, we have a brain of the brain and we have a heart of the brain. There's the emotional territory wherein emotions emerge, and there's the place where thoughts emerge. They're all in the mind.

But this place of emotionally lived experience is pollutable, because it's already relational. It's already about how do I deal with reality? So once I have this initial thought, and this wisdom, and this understanding, and this knowledge to draw it down into actuality, then I encounter Chesed, my right arm, which is this openness towards expressivity. I want to move forward with this plan. I want to push it forward because the world is my oyster and there's no prevention whatsoever.

But that initial excitement and that infantile excitement of how smooth things are going to be obviously has to be tempered by the left arm of Gevurah or Din, which is constriction, limitation, a pushback against that natural flow of Chesed. Chesed when unregulated becomes destructive. We know that Arayot, famously the parashah of Arayot, illicit relationships in the Torah, is identified as a chesed. Why? Because the unbridled desire to give over and to share and to be mashpia without knowing where I'm being mashpia, where I'm sharing, is obviously going to lead to a destructive thing.

So Chesed needs Gevurah. The overflow needs constriction. The water needs fire. And then after chesed and gevurah, I come to a place of unity between these two polarizing elements of here's how I want to see it happen, but here are the restrictions.

Then I arrive at a place of a unity of self, which is tiferet, a balance of opposites, where I say, okay, I want, but I also know I have to restrict, and here's how I'm going to develop a middle path. That tiferet is the secret of all things. And then once I've come to terms with how I would like to see this happen in accordance with the rules of reality, the gevurah, so then I have to endure, I have to overcome that natural laziness that wants to let go of this, and I have to have my netzach. That's an offshoot of chesed.

It's the right leg, like the right arm is chesed, the right leg is netzach, because netzach is the desire to overcome prevention, to overcome the resistance, to jump beyond that which is blocking me. But then again, that natural exuberance of the self has to be tempered by hod, which is submission, which is the recognition of powerlessness, because anytime that I think I'm doing anything, I have to remember in the next moment that I'm not the one who's doing this, and I have to give it over to God, and I have to be grateful for the strength that I have. And then when those

two opposites can coalesce, they come to a place of yesod, of foundation, where the thing is ready to be expressed. And then there's the malchut, the feminine quality of it, which is the expression of the thing itself.

And so we have the Gimmel Rishonot, which are the idealized forms of will, wisdom, and understanding that express themselves through the bridge of knowledge. Then the lower seven sefirot of the emotional territories, and we can say that the chesed, gevurah, tiferet are much more visceral, emotionally lived states, and the netzach, hod, and the yesod, which are simply a triad that's reflective of the one prior to it, is the embodied experience. So the question that really we have to ask ourselves is what is enabling this transition? What enables the ideal when things were the way that they were supposed to be, in the womb of comfort, where everything is good and beautiful, and kind, and compassionate, and I feel good about myself, and I feel good about Hashem, and I feel good about the world, and I feel good about my connections and my attachments, what bridges, what enables that world of idealism to continue to express itself down in a world that has already lost its original idealism? Because the zayin tachtonot, the lower seven sefirot, are subject to a certain traumatic breaking.

They break. They encounter reality and they break. They fall apart, because once we experience reality, the idealism that we thought was going to be the guiding principle suddenly

breaks down and falls apart, and a person is left in ultimately a pile of broken vessels, which is the emergence of creation. And so how do we bond the pre-traumatic state of Keter, Chochmah, and Binah, where God is very present in our desire, in our wisdom, in our understanding, in our contemplative process, with a world of our emotionally lived and physically embodied experience, where it very often feels that God is actually very absent from that place? And so we said that Daat is the bridge, but we'll leave Daat aside for now, because the real hero, the sefirah that really serves one of the most fundamental points, is Binah.

Binah. Because Binah, like we said, is the lowest of the upper three sefirot: there's Keter, Chochmah, and Binah. So it's the lowest of the upper territory, it's the lowest ideal. And then after Binah comes chesed, gevurah, tiferet, netzach, hod, yesod, and malchut.

So Binah serves this territory of the birth or the emergence of the lower seven sefirot from within the upper three sefirot, that Binah is the place, it's the point of origin, it's the mother of the children, *em ha-banim semeichah*, the joyous mother of the children. Binah is referred to as *Ima*, as that motherly presence that is the source of the outgrowth of the children, which are going to be chesed, gevurah, tiferet, netzach, hod, yesod, and malchut. Chochmah is the *Abba*. Chochmah is that masculine principle of a general picture without any definition, and Binah is that motherly containment and

division and separation that enables for the gestation of an idea to begin to take shape in accordance with its particularity.

Now, this beginning emergence of particularity, of cutting through the original whole and living in a world of parts and particularization and separation, if we're thrown from unity into separation, that trauma is too big to handle. Nobody could survive that. You can't go from Chochmah into the zayin tach- Tachtonot. A person doesn't overcome a fall like that.

You can't go from absolute nothingness into the thickness of somethingness. Binah serves as the intermediary stage that represents the end of the upper three sefirot, the lowest part of the upper three sefirot, and the highest emergent point, the origin, as it were, of the lower seven sefirot. That she's the mother of the children, the children always relate to the mother. Sometimes it's harder for the children to relate to the father.

The closer we come to messianic revelation, the fathers learn how to be mothers also, and the children begin to relate more to the father as well, which means that we have more of an access to Chochmah. But generally speaking, it was the mother that had the relationship with the children. Binah is the source from which the differentiated sefirot emerge, which means that Binah is going to be playing an in-between

role. Binah on the one hand is going to be subject to the rules of the upper three sefirot, which means that it's refinement, purity, clarity, a keen awareness of divine presence.

But at the very same point, she's also going to have to be the emergence of particularization and separation, and *dinim* and *gevurot*, and all of the intensity of this world, but they can't be symptomatic of the broken world, because if you bring the symptoms of the broken world back into the womb of Binah, then you're polluting the territory of the *gimel rishonot*. So Binah is wedged in between these two stages where, on the one hand, she has the qualities of the upper *mochin*, which means purity of all purity, clarity of all clarity, goodness of goodness, but at the same point, difficulty, constriction, concealment, particularization, differentiation emerge from within the womb of Binah itself. And so Binah... Each and every sefirah has a name.

Each and every sefirah has a name. The Arizal describes that there's two ways to contemplate godliness in this world: there's the path of the *tziyur*, of image, where we describe it in terms of light, of meditating on light and meditating on different colors and hues of experience, which is more of an experiential process. Then there's also the *derech* of *shemot*, the path of names, which are the names of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, because, like we said, we can't relate to Hashem Himself, but we can relate to His names, and through His names we

relate to Him Himself. And so each and every sefirah has a different name.

The sefirah of Keter has the name Ehekeh, which is I will be, it's a future orientation, a patience, an abiding waiting. Chochmah is Yud-Kei, Kah, which is a very pointed expression of godliness. Binah is the shem Havayah, Yud-Kei-Vav-Kei, which represents rachamim, which represents overflow, which represents growth and expression. But the nekudot of the name are for the word Elokim, which means din.

The name Havayah represents Hashem's chesed, and the name Elokim represents Hashem's din. Those two realms of the ideal and the real. But Binah actually wedges herself in between both of them so that her name is Havayah, which is oriented towards the purity of the upper realms of clarity, but the nekudot, the vowelization, the way that it expresses itself, the way that it can be vowelized and expressed externally is with the otivot, with the nekudot of Elokim. So again, we're seeing this paradox at the heart of Binah, which on the one hand it's representative of the ideal, but as the bottom of the ideal, it also represents the emergent point from which the real is going to emerge.

Which is why Binah, for example, is referred to as grapes, It comes from a vine. And a grape has pure potential within itself, has pure potential within itself, and then the wine

emerges after the crushing. So wine is already a severe thing. It burns the palate.

But the grape is something that's purified and contained. Binah is the grape and the wine within it. Binah is the end of the upper level and the beginning of the lower level. Now, because of this unique paradoxical element at the heart of Binah, Binah becomes a fundamental vehicle through which we function.

Our main relationship with Hashem is through this space of Binah, because as human beings, we live within the fragmentation realm, we live within the realm of fragmentation and brokenness. We are that post-traumatic disunity at the heart of all of the different middot that are at war with one another. We're chaotic creatures, we're after the fall, we're after Adam Harishon partook of the Etz Hada'at, we're after the nesirah, like we spoke about last time. And because of that, we feel discombobulated and disunified within ourselves, and we're at war within ourselves.

selves, because we're like varied puzzle pieces that are trying to put themselves back together. And then, as maturity comes, we draw mochin down, we draw consciousness down. Now, the main stage of consciousness that a Jewish person is always engaged in, if you look at all of the kavanot of the Arizal for the six days of the week, the main thing that we're trying to do is to draw down the mochin of Binah. The

wisdom, the mind of understanding, because that's our origin.

That's the highest point that we can get to, how to unify the fragmentation of our lives. On Shabbat, we access a new level called Chochmah, of wisdom, of nothingness, where everything is calm. But most of our relationship is ultimately this womb of Binah, where we're struggling to put ourselves back together, to figure out how the pieces make sense, how I can actually hold myself in a serious way in spite of all of the contradictions and the wars that go on within me, how I can hold this fragmented thing called consciousness and subjectivity, the thin veneer of sanity together. The answer is Binah.

That as long as I can hold on to that em habanim semeichah, that level of understanding, so then I can I can have a way in the world. That's the gate. Nun sha'arei Binah. Binah is defined by gates.

It's the gate that separates the two territories. It's the gate through which I can climb out of the insanity and the chaos of the real, of that which is taking shape in front of me in reality, and re-access this purified space of the mind called the ideal. When a person learns Rav Kook, all you're getting is the ideal. Not all you're getting, chas veshalom, I shouldn't say such a thing, but for us, for the country, for those who for the

history of reception of Rav Kook has only been able to watch Rav Kook speak about the ideal.

They have not yet realized how to bring that ideal into a real. We haven't done that yet, and be'ezrat Hashem we'll learn how to do that. But Rav Kook spoke, that was the question. You read Rav Mirsky's book, you see Rav Kook was an idealized person, and ideals don't necessarily work really well in the face of reality.

I think we quoted T. S. Eliot last week also, where he said that human beings don't tolerate reality very much. So we're always trying to climb our way back into Binah. Binah for this reason is referred to as teshuvah, as the olam of teshuvah. Why is it called the olam of teshuvah? Because what's teshuvah? What are we doing? Teshuvah is a return to the source. And a return to the source is the desire for fragmentation to find the point of unity from which it comes from. We're always working our way out of a fragmented state of mind.

Binah and the Birth of Fragmentation (בינה)

That's at least the Binah perspective. We start with that which is broken, as the Ramchal says in the beginning of Mesillat Yesharim, to be human is akin to being thrown into a preexisting battle with bullets already whizzing by your head, and not only do you not know who's shooting, but you're

not meant to know. That's the nature of this world. It's chaos.

It's separation, it's fragmentation. It expresses itself, even though it's a Shem Havayah, it sounds very much like a Shem Elokim, which is gematria teva, which, like my saba used to say, that the harshest statement that Chazal ever said is *olam keminhago noheg*. But what can we do? A *ganav* could steal seeds and plant in the ground, and the fruit will grow, because that's, the world operates according to its natural way. According to the natural way of things, it's pure fragmentation.

But Binah, the notion of return, is how do I bring my fragmentation back into a place of unity? Back into a womb of potential being where, yes, there was the emergence of fragmentation. The Zohar Hakadosh refers to Binah as *dinin mit'arin mineih*, that *din*, the eventual constriction and the symptomatic expression of *gevurah* that is going to be felt in day-to-day experience, it can be traced back up to Binah. If we want to figure out where the severity came from, it came from that territory of Binah, because Binah gives birth to reality. But at the very same point, the constriction at that level of Binah is still refined.

Sweetening Judgment at Its Root (המתקת הדינים) (בשורשם)

It's the potential towards constriction. This point deserves pause because it's an abstract point, but it has a fundamental and therapeutic value, that Chazal tell us that there's a secret called hamtakat hadinim beshorasham, sweetening severity in its root. The Ba'al Shem Tov Hakadosh and his talmidim took this and ran with it in many, many different ways.

What it means on a psychologically lived and cabalistically experienced level, based on the partzufim, is that once we enter into the territory of brokenness and fragmentation of the seven lower sefirot, there is difficulty. God's light is concealed, and the concealment of God's light eventually leads to suffering. Because suffering is rooted in the absence of God and the encounter with constriction and concealment and husks of impurity that cover over the main point in my life, that leave me wandering around without knowing how I'm ever going to get through this moment. Those are dinim, gevurot.

There's a number line to them. There's gradations of it, but ultimately we encounter gevurah and din in this world. And in order to deal with it, in order to learn how to function, we have to sweeten those dinim. We have to rectify the severity that we encounter.

We have to take the symptom of the lower seven sefirot and figure out, how does God fit into this picture? And the Arizal teaches us based on the Zohar Hakadosh that there's a real principle called *hamtakat hadinim beshorasham*, the sweetening of the judgments in their root. What that means is that if you understand the root of severity, where difficulty comes from, where the suffering comes from, where the constriction comes from, then already it's sweetened. Because if you can draw the fragmentation and the separation and all of the real lived experience and the symptoms of day-to-day life that are expressive of the pockets of *gevurah* and *shevirah* that we encounter, if we can trace it back to a place where God's unity is still ever-present, so then in spite of the fact that there's severity, in spite of the fact that there's concealment, nevertheless, they're seen in a new light. By revealing the root, by revealing the source from which the difficulty emerges, there's a sweetening that takes place because we realize that, ah, in truth all of this constriction that I'm feeling is just an expression of the loftiest levels, which are the upper *gimel* sefirot, which is *binah*.

And when a person is able to go back to that place, that's *teshuvah*. That's the rectification. That's where I'm able to learn to live with the difficulties. And we're going to get to very practical insight, three different ways of what *hamtakat hadinim beshorasham* means, sweetening the judgments in their root.

Malchut Returns to Binah

This brings us back to Yom Kippur and reveals why these hakdamot matter. That we spoke last week ultimately about how what's taking place, what's happening during Rosh Hashanah, was the nesirah, was a severing. That malchut, experience, consciousness, was no longer receiving from the thing that it was dependent on, which was Ze'ir Anpin, or like we said, notions that we live with, principles that we feel fundamentally rooted in, the addictions in thought that we have to certain principles or ideas. Most of the year, our functioning is built upon previously held beliefs that we don't question very much.

But on Rosh Hashanah, those previously held beliefs go to sleep. Ze'ir Anpin is put into a slumber, and we enter into that ach be-ach relationship that we spoke about, this back-to-back relationship where a person is now left struggling with having severed that codependent relationship, but through that severance of the codependency, now malchut and self develops the possibility of developing maturity. Malchut always has to receive consciousness. Malchut can't function on its own.

The world is too dangerous. Reality is too dangerous. So even when it appears that malchut has now lost its source of input, has lost the place where it was drawing its certainty from, there's a secret that takes place at the heart of the nesirah, at

the heart of this surgical separation, which is that malchut, instead of receiving from what she was dependent on, which was Ze'ir Anpin, that masculine impulse, now malchut begins to receive directly from the source of binah itself. And that's why the entire notion of Yom Kippur, which is the end of the nesirah, the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah is the nesirah, each and every sefirah is menaser, there's a severing, and then Yom Kippur comes and malchut is left alone, destitute, having been completely removed and separated from her counterpart upon which she was dependent until a moment before.

But instead of falling into terror and falling into despair and falling into all of the post-traumatic elements, what happens is that malchut runs right back into the womb of binah. Malchut says, "Oh, I'm not going to get from Ze'ir Anpin anymore, I'm not going to receive from that place that I thought I was receiving from. I'm going to run all the way, all the way back to the source." And when malchut goes up to binah, which is what's happening on Yom HaKippurim, all of the symptoms, all of the struggle of what it means to be a human being runs directly into a place of safety, it runs directly into a place of purity, it runs directly into a territory in which it feels completely safe. In spite of the fact that it's not in accordance with the typical order of development, because malchut is not meant to operate directly in relationship with binah.

She's meant to have a relationship with Ze'ir Anpin, that's what's going to happen. But for now on Yom Kippur, there's the comfort of running back into the womb of binah, of entering into the womb of purity, of taking all of the separation, all of the confinement, all of the symptoms, and running into a place of menuchah, of calmness, a knowledge that I am okay, I am safe. It is an ir miklat. It is the place that the accidental murderer goes.

The World of Freedom (עלמא דחירו)

It's the tevah of Noach. It's a place in the mind where I say to Hashem, "I know I'm not worthy, I know I'm not ready, I know I'm not able to face this in the way that I'm ready to face You, the yichud of Yom HaKippurim, but I'm running to You, I'm throwing myself back up into You, and I'm going to wait here, I'm going to hibernate in this place of safety." That's what's happening on Yom HaKippurim. Yom HaKippurim, everything about Yom HaKippurim is Malchut going back up into Binah. It's all of the dinim, all of the constriction, all of the things that we're afraid of, all of the fears, and we're bringing it back to a place where, yes, there's a reality of fears, there's a reality of constriction, there's a reality of separation, but it's seen in its idealized form. Every element of Yom HaKippurim participates in this return. This is teshuvah. The hei inuyim, the fact that I'm depriving myself

theoretically, is all because Binah is also referred to as Olam HaBa.

Binah is a place of comfort, it's the womb. Gan Eden is identified with Binah, where a person is able to sit with a fluid movement of thought and contemplate one idea about God, and from there encounter another idea of God rather than falling back into the natural anxiety of this world. And then instead of being, thrown back, I actually sustain the thought of Godliness. Binah, when I'm able to function in a moment of Alma de-Atei, of calmness of Binah, it's meivin davar mitoch davar.

My heart is aflame with teshukah to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Because yes, Binah is the birth of all of the separation, but it's also the entry point into the worlds of unity. And in that place of the mind where I'm still a self, I'm still with all of my stuff, I'm still saying, "Al chet shechatanu," I'm not pretending that I've negated my mind through absolute emptiness of the mind. I'm still a person, but I'm seeing all of the elements of my humanity, all of the symptoms of my human condition, through the light of teshuvah, through the light of what the Zohar HaKadosh refers to as Binah as Alma de-Cheiru, the world of freedom.

A freedom that is not constricted or confined to a particular perception of self, which then leads to shame and guilt over not being able to live in accordance with those principles.

What psychologists used to refer to as the tyranny of the should, of living in a world where I should be this or I should be that. Binah begins to see itself in the illumination of itself. It's the source of simchah.

Em habanim smeichah. Binah knows the separation that comes out from her, but Binah also knows the purpose for which HaKadosh Baruch Hu created the world, which is for all of separation to come back into a place of unity. That's what's happening on Yom HaKippurim. We're entering into a place of purity of mind, entering into a place of understanding that there is constriction in this world, but the constriction is not something that's separate and apart from Hashem.

The Hidden Work of Ketoret (קטורת)

It's part of Hashem's plan. Once we're able to see the constriction is part of Hashem's plan, so then we can enter into the sugya of hamtakat hadinim beshorsham, sweetening the judgments in their root. Yom Kippur is the day of ketoret. Ketoret, for the Arizal, is a very mysterious sugya.

It's a sugya that Moshe Rabbeinu took sugyot from all of the malachim. He learned secrets from all of the angels. But there was one angel that didn't want to give him a secret, and it was the Malach HaMavet, the angel of death. And Moshe Rabbeinu said, "I'm not leaving here until I get a gift from

you." The same way that when we come home on Shabbat night that we're not leaving until the Malach Ra says "Amen" when we say "Good Shabbat." The same way that Yaakov Avinu doesn't let go of the Malach of Esav until he gives him a berachah.

The same way that Bilam doesn't get out until he transforms his curse into a berachah, because that's the purpose of this world: to transform, not to cope, to transform. And so the ketoret, the secret of ketoret was given to Moshe Rabbeinu from the Malach HaMavet himself, because ketoret represents concealment. It represents the thickening element of this world when it goes just a little bit beyond the line of reasonable faith, where I can no longer make sense out of the situation. There's a very interesting teaching the Sefer Yetzirah says.

It's fundamentally based on the principle that we just taught about the ten sefirot. And when it comes to understanding the sefirot, one must always remember that it is ten, ten sefirot, Keter to Malchut, ten and not nine, and ten and not eleven. There's problems with detracting one, and there's problems with adding one. We'll look at the perspective of the problem of adding one.

It is the error of thinking that we have the right to add upon God's creation, not to cultivate and grow, but rather to add more, as if God was missing something. So when we go from

ten to eleven, that's representative of the notion that all who add are actually detracting. Because if I'm trying to impose my human ingenuity upon reality, rather than cultivate and harness the energies of reality towards the direct way, so I'm already conceiving of myself as a god. And so when it comes to the ketoret, there's eleven spices in the ketoret.

As such, the eleven nature of it highlights that the ketoret is this admixture of concealment. To the degree that the ketoret becomes a sugya, the topic that represents how we grapple with God's presence in evil. The whole notion of the ketoret is that included within this mixture is the chelbenah, this filthy spice that smells terrible. And from here, Chazal learn that there's no fast of the Jewish people that is complete if it doesn't have the wicked of Israel who are included within it.

Because the ketoret is the secret of how all of that which appears to be insignificant and empty and rooted in the territories of death and extra and waste and surplus, are in truth part and parcel of the fullest revelation of HaKadosh Baruch Hu's light. And Yom Kippurim, we know, was a day centered on the ketoret. And so the first path of sweetening the dinim, of bringing the dinim of malchut, our encounter with constriction, and bringing it back up to a place in which it becomes manageable, the first path is what we're going to learn from the ketoret. We say every day that when it comes to developing the ketoret, sochakan yafeh yafeh, kedei shetehei dakah min hadakah, that you should grind it up

really well so that it should be thinner than thin, it should be fine upon fine, refinement, refinement down to its irreducible core of a grinding down.

Fine upon Fine

Now this process, and it's very interesting that sochakan, which are the grindstones that grind things down are the same language as laughter, because laughter is also cracking up. It's breaking something down into bite-size, manageable pieces. And the Leshem Shevo V'Achlamah teaches us that we don't only see this process of grinding and breaking things down into bite-size pieces only by the ketoret, we also find it by maror, that there's a halachah that if a person swallows maror without chewing it, then they're not yotzei the mitzvah. Because part of the experience of gevurot is that you have to chew it down.

Now what's the notion of chewing it down? The notion of chewing it down is that first and foremost, when we encounter constriction in our lives, whether it's shame over a particular feeling, whatever the malchut symptom is in that moment, at first it appears far too large for a person to be able to handle. Every problem builds itself first and foremost on the secret of appearing overwhelming. It borrows the appearance of overwhelmingness from somewhere else.

Anxiety is just when that notion goes totally haywire and everything is overwhelming.

But issues emerge as things that are overwhelming, and part of the overwhelming nature of the issue is the size of it. Simply too big for me to handle. It's too much of an issue. There's no angle in which I can manage to get through the issue.

I can't go around it, I can't go beyond it, I can't go under it. So the etzah is first and foremost to break it down into bite-size, manageable pieces. Grind it down. Separate it.

Come to realize that more often than not, the big symptom is actually the coalescence of a lot of small symptoms, and that most of the issues that we're facing in our lives and the dire existential straits that are accosting us at every moment are not as big as they appear, but rather they are this amorphous blob of one issue that has dragged itself into another issue, and because they smell alike, so they merge as one issue, and then they say, "Hey, if we could overwhelm our host this way, then, better two than one." And so the first path of sweetening judgments is being able to laugh at the din.

Sochakan yafeh yafeh, make it smaller, break it down in size, compartmentalize the issue, figure out what are the working parts of this issue that I'm trying to address, what the themes of the issue are, what are the ways in which the din is expressing itself, and enable me to categorize first and

foremost. Or even if I can't do that on my own, at least now I know I have to ask for help in terms of categorizing the issue. This is what chewing the maror means.

It means breaking it down in size so that each piece, each piece is something I could look at. The Vilna Gaon brings a midrash, says that a king unfortunately has a son, a prince who has gone against the law and is chayav sekilah. He needs the death penalty by way of stoning. And the king is at a loss because he doesn't want to stone his child, obviously.

Obviously, but at the same point, he can't renege on law and order. And so what's he to do? Nobody had any etzah, until the chacham comes along, and he says, "Okay, so there's a big boulder that you have to throw. Nobody said it has to be thrown at once. So get the best chisellers in the land have them chisel this big boulder down into innumerable pebbles, and we'll call your son here, and we'll throw these very gentle pebbles at him, one after the other.

From Suppression to Transformation

So you won't lose out on the intensity of the punishment, the boulder is being thrown, but the person is also not going to be overwhelmed by it." So that's the first step to hamtakat hadinim that we learn on Yom Kippur. When I'm encountering malchut and it feels so blindingly overwhelming, the way to run forward to Hashem is by

realizing that my problems are not as large as they appear to be, and that I can move beyond it. I can find circuitous routes to break through. Then we come to the next two stages of hamtakat hadinin, and this is really what the entirety of Sefer Shel Beinonim is about, what the Tanya is about, and really what Rabbi Nachman of Breslov is teaching us, and what the Gra is teaching us, and what the Ramchal is teaching us, and the Rashash.

Which is that there are two stages. The first stage of handling dinim is trying to suppress them, trying to reduce them in size, trying to learn how to cope with them, how to live in a world where there's din, where there's judgment, where there's things that are not right and not operating the way I want them to operate, and I'm going to try and live my life in a way of operation and calmness and goodness, and anytime negativity emerges, I'm going to learn all of the acrobatics of the mind to repress it. And if I'm not as unhealthy, fine, we know that the repressed always returns. Okay, so we're chachamim, we're suppressing it, we're putting it on the side, but we're not dealing with the issue.

The issue is no good, it's in reality, but I'm pushing it to the side. I'm kofef it, I'm machnia it. I belittle it, I take it out of my life, I focus only on the good, I'm not paying so much attention to the problem. I bypass the issue.

That's the first way that a person is mamtik dinim, by suppressing the dinim, by pushing them down, by looking at them as incidental symptoms of what it means to be a human being in this world, but not ideal points in which I can find God, because God is only found in clarity, and I don't want to find God in concealment. And so at best, I learn how to deal, I learn how to deal with these symptoms. And we all know how to do that, We have books and books and books and books, When Sigmund Freud asked his daughter Anna, who was far more Yiddish than he was, to translate his chochmah for the next generation, the book that she developed was *The Ego and Its Defenses*. Human experience is all about defense mechanisms, of learning how to cope with a reality that doesn't feel ideal, of learning how to forget long enough without pretending it didn't happen, etc., etc. And those work for some time, that way of dealing with dinim, it works.

It's where I'm not engaging it head-on, but I'm aware of it, and I'm pushing it on the side, and I'm not going to let it bother me. And that works, it does, but it's not the goal. Because ultimately the goal of hamtakat hadinim is that after breaking it down into bite-sized manageable pieces, like grinding down the ketoret and chewing up the maror, and laughing, laughing, laughing until it falls apart, and after suppressing it and figuring out how to live in my lane with all of the awareness of struggle and the negative thoughts, but I'm not letting them overtake me, then a person is prepared to

do the true work of hamtakat hadinim, which is the real import of the word hamtakah, which means sweetening, which is to transform it, to be mehapech it. Not to suppress it, not to subdue it, but to utilize it as a meeting point, as a point of entry into Godliness.

Because there's something about the gevurot, there's something about the dinim, there's something about concealment, which as uncomfortable as it is, and as unpleasant as it feels when all we want is the security of knowing and the comfort of certainty, nevertheless, the encounter of Godliness and human existence from within the perspective of gevurah has a far more potent expression when done properly, and it brings a person face-to-face with Hashem in a way that ease and comfort would not enable a person to ever come to. Chochmah is beautiful, chochmah is wonderful, bitul be'ayin, when a person can negate themselves by way of transcendence, that's a beautiful existence, halevai. It's understandable why everybody is looking for every theoretical path in the world to do it. But the real secret is in the work of binah, where a person encounters struggle.

And a person doesn't shy away from looking at struggle, because I've learned that it's not as big as I thought it was. And I'm also not being overwhelmed from it, because I've learned how to make a place for it. But once I've domesticated it enough, now I can look at the struggle and say, "Okay, first

postulate is that Hashem is here, Hashem is there, Hashem is truly everywhere. And once I know that, then what is this din? What is this gevurah? What is this pocket of tainment and concealment that I am encountering right now, this feeling, this, this experience of unease, of anger, of resistance, of frustration, sadness.

And again, in accordance with our capacity to think our way out of whatever issue is happening, at that point suddenly a person takes this constriction and they ride it up to Hashem, and something happens. You come to realize that Hashem is in that thing with you as well. Hashem is there with you. It might not be the Hashem that you expect in that infantile desire for ease and comfort and clarity and certainty, but it certainly is the Hashem of the level of *em habanim semeichah*, that the mother is not hugging the child and saying, "Don't worry, sweetheart, you didn't get hurt, you didn't get hurt, you didn't get hurt." The mother is saying, "Don't worry, sweetheart, you got hurt, and it's okay." There's a whispering, there's an inner voice of *Binah* that whispers.

It's an inner auditory sound. *Chochmah* sees. *Yom Kippur* is not a day of seeing Hashem's unity. *Yom Kippur* is a day of entering into hearing an inner voice that says, "I can work with all of the concealment in my life because Hashem is there." Every *cheit*, every sin, every transgression, as negative as those connotations are, is ultimately a pocket of *din*, of

concealment, actually expressed in its thickest form, which is kelipah.

Still Before You (לפניך)

Each time we strike the heart during al cheit, we say, "Al cheit shechatanu lefanecha." We name the transgression and the imperfection, yet we also affirm that it occurred lefanecha: I was still before You, Hashem. We should not hear lefanecha only as, "This is the sin I performed in front of You," but also as, "This is where I became stuck, yet I know that I remained before You." I know that You were there. I am aware now that the world can be a complex place of good and apparently not good, and it's all within Your territory, Hashem.

I just crowned You on Rosh Hashanah. I just proclaimed You as King over me, and if You're King over me, You know what I am. And so if You're King over all of it, then You're King over all of the stuff. And now when I come to You with that stuff, it's no longer by way of shame.

I've announced, what do we announce at Kol Nidrei at the most serious point of Yom HaKippurim? "Ki chol ha'ambishgagah." Before we enter into this judgment, this day of severity and din, what we are announcing as a people, and very confidently so with all of the Sifrei Torah out, is that Hashem, everything that we have done is accidental. We know not what we do. We are blinded and overwhelmed.

We are turned aside. But Hashem, we are not doing it on purpose. All of the constriction of Yom HaKippurim is brought back up to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. The repetition of al cheit is not merely a litany of, "This is what I have done; this is what I have done; this is what I have done."

Before the fist hits the heart, which is Binah, we have to say, "I have done my best." In the language of the Serenity Prayer, I have to say, "Hashem, there are certain things in this trait that I can control, there are certain things that I can't control, and I ask You for the wisdom to know the difference, and I did my best, al cheit shechatanu, and I still struggled, and next year hopefully I'll be able to say it less." Because there is nothing left to break. Perhaps there was a time when the heart needed to be broken, but there is nothing left to break now. So now it's about resuscitation, and the resuscitation of the heart, which is very similar to this action of hitting the heart, is ultimately all about making space for the concealment within our relationship with HaKadosh Baruch Hu. This is what teshuvah is. It means coming to realize that I am a complex, contradictory thing, and yet I still come back to You.

The world has fragmented beyond what I could have expected, and still we come back to You. We wear white. We place ourselves within purity because we know that purity is where we come from.

To Eat Emunah (אמונה)

And this avodah of Yom HaKippurim is an experience of Olam Haba. As much as fasting is difficult, I can only speak for myself, fasting is very difficult, but the fast of Yom HaKippurim is not merely a suffering form of fasting. The Rambam codifies the fast itself as part of the kiyum of the day, which is not how fasts are typically described. As Chassidus explains, on Yom HaKippurim we come to realize that the pleasure that our soul desires is so insatiable and there's nothing in this world that could satisfy it other than Godliness, that we're not even going to pretend anymore that we can be satisfied, because we could pretend that we could be satisfied with meat and steak and wine and milk and whatever it is that a person is doing. Every action of devouring, of engaging with food or sustenance is rooted in the belief that I might find some satisfaction. On Yom HaKippurim we come to HaKadosh Baruch Hu and say, we know that the only satisfaction is You.

We want to eat emunah. We don't want to eat anything but emunah. That's why Reb Tzadok HaKohen MiLublin says that the Gemarot about the man are all found in Masechet Yoma, because the fast on Yom HaKippurim is not a fast, but it's a partaking of spirituality, you're eating spirituality, you're eating the tefillah. Now yes, it feels uncomfortable, but that just means that every ounce of discomfort when we're experiencing the fast, that's an encounter with din. The

tzaddikim who don't feel pain when they're fasting, they have to remember the din. But for us, when the body feels the pain of the fast, every moment of thinking, "What am I doing? I wish I could have something," becomes another moment of saying, "This, too, is an encounter with You". This discomfort that I feel is You. You're here.

Yonah ben Amitai

It is the repeated work of how to bring myself back to the light of unity from within a place of disunity. This is why the hero of Yom HaKippurim is Yonah ben Amitai. Yonah ben Amitai is also the dinim of malchut. He is running away.

He doesn't want to hear Hashem's voice, he doesn't want to see goodness in the world. Or whatever the reason Yonah is running away for, it's an experience of din. But at the same point, Yonah becomes the hero. Yonah becomes the one who can enter into concealment and come out the other side with clarity.

The word Yonah, the word Yonah means inauthenticity, ona'ah, trickery, fraudulency. There's laws of ona'ah that I can't lie, I can't trick, I can't steal by way of my language. It's that unique human trait of treachery, of lying for the sake of some ideal good in my mind. So that's who Yonah was.

Yonah is when a person feels insignificant, inauthentic, disconnected, when I'm functioning in a place of malchut, when I'm stuck and surrounded by dinim, where the only thing to do is to go to sleep, where the only thing to do is to go to yarketei hasefinah, to the bottom of the bottom and just pass out. That's the only way to handle that world of malchut sometimes, where a person feels that even Hashem I have to run away from. But ultimately, Yonah, this fraudulency gives birth to a ben Amitai, a level of truth, a level of truth that could only come about from this encounter with the chaos of feeling that I don't know where I'm at in this world, I don't know where I'm finding myself, I don't know how I feel. Yonah means ona'ah, Yonah means inauthenticity, ben Amitai means authenticity.

The Turning of Binah (ינהפוך הוא)

It's the same relationship: malchut, which appears to be so constricted, what we're doing is we're bringing it back to a place of emet, we're bringing it back to a place of truth. On Yom HaKippurim, we are able to see concealment through the light of truth: al chet shechatanu lefanecha, I'm right in front of You, Hashem. I've never not been right in front of You. My yechidah shebenefesh is being revealed. There is a hidden movement within everything we have described: when we enter into a place of binah properly, when we're able to enter into the constriction and the differentiation of our lives

and face it with a sense of unity, calm, joy, transformation, uplifting, teshuvah, confidence, and we're able to take all of that post-traumatic dross of the seven lower sefirot, and instead of having them very weakly connected to binah by way of a downward expression, they enter into the womb of binah and then they get turned upwards and now they face chochmah, binah is venahafochhu.

The whole inyan of Yom HaKippurim and Purim is this very element of binah, and ketoret, and sweetening din, and concealment, and transforming it into a place of rectification. The tzaddikim say venahafoch hu, Hu is binah, because binah is far from me, I can't identify with it on a face-to-face level. It's transcendent, slightly. And so I refer to it as that which is beyond me, Hu.

But venahafoch hu, the transformation takes place through the level of binah. And so when we can be mehafech all of the dinim into opportunities to encounter HaKadosh Baruch Hu, we bring it all the way all the way back to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. But something happens then, that when we can take the constriction back to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, when we can live with all of that which feels to be separate and still hold Hashem in front of us, which is really what we're doing when we learn a daf of Gemara, I'm holding myself, even though there's all these questions and difficulties and struggles, I'm still holding on to the light of Hashem, which is why Torah shebe'al peh comes from binah. Which is what

was given, the luchot sheniyot that we receive on Yom HaKippurim is the source of Torah shebe'al peh.

It's the ability to deal with constriction and differentiation and questions and apparent discord and paradox, and understand how it's all part and parcel of one daf, of one sugya. When we're able to live with the constriction, something is revealed from within binah, because what's revealed from within binah is a level of keter. That level that we said, which rests at the tippy-top source of the entire system, keter, which then gives birth to chochmah and binah—chochmah and binah are ultimately just the two ways in which keter reveals itself, the unified light of Hashem, the infinite light of Hashem, the ratzon of Hashem, which is undifferentiated. It could express itself in chochmah, where things are clarified, and Hashem could express Himself in binah, where things are concealed.

The Light of Keter Within Binah

And in that place of concealment, when we reveal the light of Hashem there, the level of keter and ratzon that's revealed there is an acceptance, a full acceptance of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, specifically within the definition of what it means to be myself with my mind, my heart, my body in this world. On a level of chochmah, I'm entering into infinitude by way of forgetting the world. It's an undifferentiated state of being.

I'm subsumed within something far greater, a far more holistic unity.

But the bitul that comes with binah is that I still retain a sense of separate identity, because that's what Hashem wants me to be. But at the same point, I'm aware that my separation is not separate, but I'm still holding on to my separation. I'm just learning how to see my own individualized separation, not through a lens of "Oh, this needs to be scrubbed away, because it's not the nothingness that I want," but rather, it's the yesh, it's the sense of self that becomes the vehicle and the particular lens through which I, and only me, can reveal the light of Hashem. And so on Yom HaKippurim, underneath this binah orientation process of all of the five tefillot and the five inuyim, and all of this experience, there's a light of keter that's being revealed the entire time.

Nusach Sefard says keter every single one of the kedushot. The Rama mi-Pano, the tzaddikim point out that lifnei Hashem tit'haru, that tit'haru is the gematria of keter. That keter is the source of purity. So what's happening again, just with this last addition, is that when we learn to go through the various stages of hamtakat hadinim, where we have abandoned those previously held beliefs that would comfort us in our faith, that's the nesirah.

We no longer have Zeir Anpin feeding the idea to us, and there's a momentary loss of self where malchut feels that she's destitute and alone and she descends down into the territories of death. But ultimately what's revealed in this miraculous moment, which is the same thing that happened on Purim, is that we come to realize that in the moment that malchut feels most absent, she's embraced by binah. She's embraced by that motherly embrace that comes and says, "You're safe here," in your miklat, which says, "You don't have to run anymore," the secret of teshuvah, which says that you're good, you're fine, the secret of cheirut, which says that you're free, you're okay, you can be happy. The paradox is deliberate.

Hashem Hu HaElokim (ה' הוא האלקים)

And in that place, there's a certain light of ratzon that unfolds within a person, where we're able to come to realize at the end, Hashem Hu ha-Elokim, Hashem Hu ha-Elokim. Because the mefarshim all ask the question: Why are we saying Hashem Hu ha-Elokim? We just said Hashem means compassion, grace, goodness, illumination. Elokim means concealment. You would think that at the end of Yom HaKippurim, at the apex of Yom HaKippurim, we should be saying Elokim Hu Hashem: I have come to realize that all of the concealment is, in fact, part and parcel of a greater unity, which would still be reminiscent of this transcendental impulse that says, "I need to escape this world." But the secret

of Yom HaKippurim, which is the secret of saying Baruch shem kevod malchuto le'olam va'ed out loud, which is the secret of yichuda tata'ah, which is the secret of the profound value that comes about specifically from us human beings in this world—the real joke is that we're just dressing like malachim to get them off our back.

We don't want to be malachim. We're different than malachim. We're pretending to be malachim so they can let us do our job. They have their role to play with se'ir la-Azazel, the whole thing is gantz theater.

But at this point, we're saying Hashem Hu ha-Elokim, that Hashem, the light of unity, is being revealed specifically within the particularity, within Elokim itself. Elokim is that which is being illuminated. We're not allowing Elokim, din, separation, to disappear in this cloud of unknowing unity. We're actually allowing a cloud of unity to express itself within the fragmentation of Elokim, where the world of separation is revealed to be the very site in which were meant to reveal HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

As the Ba'al haTanya says, that it's the secret of chashmal ha-elyon, which is the body, which is the guf, which is the levush, which is higher than that which it's garbing. Usually we say the garment is not as valuable, Elokim is not valuable. It's only valuable because it engarbs Havayah. But on Yom HaKippurim, what we're realizing is that the entire purpose

of that light of Havayah is to illuminate the garment of Elokim so that the garment itself shines.

From Yom HaKippurim to Sukkot

From there we enter the simchah of Sukkot. We go into the simchah of finding joy in this world, having accepted the dinim, having accepted the fact that, Hashem, sometimes You hide Yourself, and sometimes I'll have to bring binah, malchut, which is Yerushalayim shel matah, all the way back up to binah, which is Yerushalayim shel ma'alah. Then comes Sukkot where we realize that the two of them are the same: Yerushalayim shel matah is Yerushalayim shel ma'alah, as long as we are okay living in huts that are just reminding us every second of the transiency of things.

That is where the true simchah comes: the simchah of Kohelet and breath and unity. So that's the avodah of Yom HaKippurim. Everything about Yom HaKippurim is bringing malchut back up to binah.

5. The Holy Helplessness of Yom HaKippurim

Tohu deKedushah and the Hope That Is Born Beyond Hope

Yom HaKippurim (יום הכיפורים) is usually described as the most ordered day of the Jewish year. Its prayers are fixed, its confessions carefully arranged, and its prohibitions clearly defined. In the time of the Beit HaMikdash, the avodat hayom (עבודת היום) unfolded through an exact sequence in which every immersion, garment, confession, lottery, offering, sprinkling, and movement had its appointed place. Nothing could be improvised. The entire life of Klal Yisrael depended upon the Kohen Gadol carrying out the service with perfect precision. Yet hidden within that supreme order was an encounter with something that no order could contain. The Kohen Gadol entered the Kodesh HaKodashim (קודש הקודשים), the place where ordinary distinctions dissolved before the absolute presence of HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

At the same time, another part of the service moved away from the Temple, beyond the ordered boundaries of human habitation, into the wilderness with the se'ir la'Azazel. The most structured day of the year therefore reached its deepest point at the edge of structure itself. The perfected vessels of tikkun (תיקון) carried Klal Yisrael to the threshold of tohu (תוהו). This paradox opens the inner avodah of the day. The

chaos of Yom HaKippurim is not the chaos of a person who never built a life, never accepted responsibility, and never learned how to serve Hashem with steadiness. It is the higher tohu that becomes possible only after the vessels have been built.

When Effort Becomes Prayer

A person begins in confusion, works toward order, and then discovers that even the highest human order cannot grasp the ways of Hashem. The first unknowing is immaturity. The final unknowing is the humility born from knowledge itself. This is tachlit hayediah shelo neda (תכלית הידיעה שלא נדע): the culmination of knowing is to know that we do not know. The day therefore asks us to make a movement that appears impossible. We must enter as responsible human beings who have prepared, repaired, confessed, and resolved to change, yet within the innermost chamber we must surrender the fantasy that our preparations can produce our own kapparah.

We do everything we can, and then we admit that what must finally be done cannot be done by us. That admission is not a rejection of avodah. It is the completion of avodah. Human effort builds the vessel; holy helplessness opens it to the light that only Hashem can give. The yahrtzeiten associated with Yom HaKippurim and its departure bring this secret into focus. The Ba'al HaSulam, Rav Yehudah Leib Ashlag, and

Reb Osher Freund each taught in his own language that a person reaches genuine prayer only when the confidence in self-salvation has been exhausted. Their teachings are severe because they expose how deeply the self tries to occupy the very place that belongs to Hashem.

They are also filled with compassion because once the illusion of self-sufficiency falls away, failure no longer has to become shame. It can become *chisaron* (חיסרון), and *chisaron* can become *tefillah* (תפילה). The broken place is no longer proof that Hashem has abandoned the person. It becomes the place in which the person finally discovers that there was never anything but Hashem.

The Three Movements From Chaos to Order and Back

There is a *tohu* beneath *tikkun* and a *tohu* beyond *tikkun*, and confusing the two distorts the entire teaching. The lower *tohu* is the instability of a life without vessels. A person is ruled by impulse, flooded by contradiction, and unable to remain faithful to a direction. That condition must not be romanticized. Torah asks us to build *kelim*: habits, obligations, boundaries, clarity, accountability, and a self capable of keeping its word. The passage from this first chaos into *tikkun* is a genuine spiritual achievement. Once that order has been built, however, it can harden into a subtler

form of exile. The person begins to identify with the vessels and to imagine that the map of spiritual life is the territory itself.

Because he understands the categories, he believes he understands Hashem. Because he performs the correct actions, he assumes that he controls their result. Because he has learned the path of teshuvah, he approaches Yom HaKippurim with an account of what he has accomplished and what he should therefore receive. The tools that once rescued him from chaos become a defense against dependence. The higher *tohu* begins when that defense is released. The vessels remain, but they no longer pretend to contain the Infinite. This is the meaning of *orot de-tohu be-kelim de-tikkun*: the vast lights of *tohu* received within vessels strong enough not to shatter.

The Higher Tohu

The person does not abandon halachah, discipline, moral responsibility, or the work of change. He carries them all into a more radical humility. He knows the order and faithfully serves within it, while knowing that the One he serves exceeds every order he knows. The difference can be stated through three stages. At first, a person says, “I do not know,” because he has not yet learned. He then says, “I know,” because he has labored to acquire wisdom and stability. Finally, he says, “I do

not know,” because wisdom itself has revealed its limit. The first statement is empty of knowledge; the last is full of everything knowledge has taught.

Kohelet gives voice to this mature bewilderment: Amarti echkamah vehi rechokah mimeni, I said that I would become wise, but wisdom remained distant from me. The greater the circle of light, the greater the perimeter of darkness it reveals. This is why the higher *tohu* cannot be reached by bypassing *tikkun*. A person cannot call avoidance surrender or call confusion transcendence. The one who refuses to act has not necessarily relinquished control; often he remains controlled by fear. Holy helplessness comes after honest effort. It is the recognition that although action is demanded of us, salvation does not originate in us. We are responsible for the vessel, but we are not the source of the light.

The Kohen Gadol Between Adam and Lo Adam

The Kohen Gadol embodies this movement in its most concentrated form. No one could enter the *Kodesh HaKodashim* casually. He entered only on the holiest day, through the holiest service, after exacting preparation. His every action declared the dignity of adam: the human being capable of sanctifying the body, time, clothing, speech, and movement. He did not wander into mystery. He approached it through obedience. Yet the Torah also describes the inner

chamber in a language that leaves room for the startling teaching of Chazal: no adam was present in the Ohel Moed when the Kohen Gadol entered to effect atonement. The man who entered had to become, in some sense, lo adam.

He crossed the threshold as a fully prepared person, but he could not remain enclosed within his human identity. Before the Infinite, the self that knows, manages, possesses, and deserves had to disappear. This does not mean that the Kohen Gadol ceased to be responsible for the service. It means that responsibility itself was purified of ownership. He performed the avodah, but the kapparah was not his achievement. He entered with all the vessels of tikkun and discovered within them a heart that no vessel could master. R' Yitzchak Meir Morgenstern's reading of besulat Yisrael as containing the letters of lev tohu expresses this inner point.

The Wilderness Within

Beneath all the accumulated history, wisdom, sin, merit, and repair of Israel remains a virginal place, a heart not yet mastered by explanation. The Kohen Gadol enters that heart of tohu and stands before Hashem as if nothing has yet been said. The paradox of adam and lo adam is therefore not a clever contradiction. It describes the essential passage of the day. We spend the year constructing a human self capable of choosing, repairing, and serving. On Yom HaKippurim, that

self reaches its holiest act by yielding its claim to ultimacy. The person does not vanish into irresponsibility. The illusion that the person is self-created and self-sustaining vanishes.

What remains is a transparent merkavah, a life through which the will of Hashem can move. The se'ir la'Azazel reveals the same secret from the opposite direction. The ordered service in the Beit HaMikdash cannot be understood without the animal sent into the wilderness, into the place beyond settlement and recognizable holiness. The day refuses to leave the chaotic, unwanted, and unassimilated parts of the soul outside its avodah. It leads them into the wilderness and returns them to their root. Kapparah does not come because we have successfully presented only the orderly self to Hashem. It comes when even the places that do not fit our spiritual self-image are included in the encounter.

Ki Kol Haam Bishgagah

When the fantasy of control collapses, a person often meets ye'ush. As long as the road appears linear, confidence is easy. If A leads to B and B leads to C, effort seems able to guarantee arrival. A person can then appear before Hashem with a spiritual ledger: these are my good deeds, these are my improvements, and this is the future I believe I have earned. Such a person may be sincere, but his prayer remains entangled with a claim. He does not merely ask Hashem for

life; somewhere within, he explains why life is owed to him. Yom HaKippurim breaks that ledger open.

If we insist that we know, then our knowledge itself accuses us: if we understood so clearly, why did we live so differently? If we present ourselves as fully coherent agents, we must answer for every incoherence. The day therefore brings us to the verse *ki kol ha'am bishgagah*. We confess that sin is never simply the act of a lucid self calmly choosing distance from its own Source. *Ein adam over aveirah ella im ken nichnas bo ruach shtus*, a person sins only when a spirit of folly enters him. Every sin contains a moment of madness in which the creature forgets the truth that gives it life.

Beyond Shame

This recognition must never be used to erase responsibility or excuse harm. Teshuvah requires confession, repair, restitution where possible, and a real commitment not to repeat the act. Yet shame insists that the failure reveals the deepest identity of the person; compassion sees that the failure arose from blindness, fear, compulsion, woundedness, or a desperate attempt to survive apart from the only Life that can sustain us. Responsibility says, "I must repair what I have done." Shame says, "What I have done is all that I am." Yom HaKippurim accepts the first and dissolves the second. This is the holy "insanity plea" of the day.

We do not claim that our actions have no consequences. We confess that the self which sinned was caught in ruach shtus, estranged from its own truth. We stand before Hashem and say: Ribono shel Olam, I thought I was an independent being who could secure himself, satisfy himself, and direct his own world. That belief was my madness. I acted within it, and I am responsible for returning from it, but only Your compassion can reach beneath the act and restore the person who became lost inside it. The final words of Avinu Malkeinu express this movement with unbearable simplicity: choneinu va'aneinu ki ein banu ma'asim; aseh imanu tzedakah va'chesed vehoshi'einu.

After every request and every effort to awaken merit, we arrive at the confession that we have no deeds upon which to make a claim. We do not say that we have literally performed nothing good. We say that even our goodness cannot purchase life from its Source. We ask for the gift as a gift. This is where judgment opens into rachamim rabim, because the person has stopped demanding that Divine compassion appear as the wage of human accomplishment. Hashem's answer is salachti. Forgiveness does not declare that nothing happened. It declares that the sin does not possess the final word about what the person is.

Salachti reaches the point beneath behavior, beneath explanation, beneath the managed identity that insists upon being either righteous or ruined. There the soul is still besulah, still capable of beginning, because its deepest life was never self-generated. The One who created it can create it again.

The Baal HaSulam and the Fullness of Chisaron

The Ba'al HaSulam teaches that the basic human condition is the ratzon lekabel, the will to receive for oneself. This is not a minor defect pasted onto an otherwise completed creature. It is the substance from which human avodah begins. The person experiences himself as a center, reads the world through need, and instinctively tries to draw everything into the orbit of the self. Left unexamined, even Torah and prayer can become instruments through which the self seeks security, importance, pleasure, or control. The discovery of this condition can be devastating. A person may labor for years and then recognize that self-interest has accompanied him into every holy place.

He may respond by intensifying self-hatred, as though violence against the self could free him from self-obsession. The Ba'al HaSulam points toward a different beginning: hakarat hachisaron, an honest recognition of deficiency. The creature must cease pretending that it created its own nature

or can heal that nature through the very ego that requires healing. To accept chisaron does not mean to celebrate selfishness. It means to tell the truth about the material Hashem has given us to transform. The will to receive is the creature's hunger for life; its repair is not annihilation but a change of form, from receiving for oneself alone toward receiving in order to give.

Such transformation begins only when the person stops claiming to stand outside the condition he hopes to change. As long as he imagines himself already pure, his avodah remains another expression of the self's need to admire itself. The Ba'al HaSulam writes in his letters that there is no moment richer than the moment in which a person has exhausted his own strength and finally understands that his strength cannot save him. This teaching is easily misunderstood. It does not praise laziness or tell the person to surrender before acting. The decisive phrase is that he has done what he can. He has applied his mind, discipline, honesty, and effort, and the effort itself has brought him to the boundary of effort.

Prayer After Self Reliance

Only there does his need become whole enough to become a whole prayer. Before that point, prayer often functions as an assistant to a plan the person still controls. He asks Hashem to bless the strategy, strengthen the identity, and deliver the result already chosen. After the collapse of self-reliance, prayer changes its nature. The person no longer informs Hashem how salvation must look. He asks for *etzah* because he genuinely does not know. He asks for strength because he has discovered that strength is not private property. He asks for closeness because every other possession has become incapable of satisfying the need beneath his needs.

The story told about the Ba'al HaSulam before his ascent to Eretz Yisrael gives this teaching biographical force. Having felt that he had completed what he could accomplish where he was, he spoke as though no further *avodah* remained for him in this world. The pain of his family opened another possibility: in Eretz Yisrael, there might be new ground for service, a new *chisaron* through which life could continue. Whether read historically or inwardly, the movement is striking. Renewal did not come from proving that he already possessed more. It came from discovering another place in which he was needed and another deficiency through which Hashem could call him forward.

This is the fullness hidden in chisaron. A lack is painful because something is absent, but the absence also creates direction, longing, and relationship. A completely self-sufficient being could not pray, receive, love, or be transformed. The human being is created unfinished so that life may remain an encounter. The Shechinah dwells bimkom hachisaron because the unfilled place refuses to close itself against the Giver.

Reb Osher Freund and the Avodah of This Breath

Reb Osher Freund brings the same truth into the immediate texture of lived experience. His language repeatedly strips the person of grand spiritual fantasies and returns him to the point at which he actually stands. Left to myself, I become lost in myself. My calculations multiply, my fears acquire the appearance of wisdom, and my attempts to secure the future separate me from the only moment in which Hashem is giving me life. The cure begins when I admit that I do not know how to carry even this moment without Him. In Imrei Osher, the work is described as a stubborn willingness to remain present within one's pain while recognizing that the strength to remain is itself a gift from Hashem.

This is not passive resignation. Passivity withdraws from the moment; Reb Osher's shiflut enters it completely. A person stops fleeing into explanations of why the pain should not

exist, stops constructing an imaginary future in which he will finally become invulnerable, and asks for the ability to live faithfully inside the breath being given now. Such smallness is a form of healing because it releases the body and soul from the impossible task of controlling the whole story at once. The mind may be blocked. The road may be hidden. The person may have no answer to the question of how everything will turn out.

The Strength of Smallness

He still has this breath and the possibility of turning within it toward Hashem. The next right act may be very small, but smallness is no longer humiliation. It is the vessel proportionate to the light currently being given. Reb Osher's helplessness therefore contains tremendous stubbornness. The person refuses to make his confusion into evidence that Hashem is absent. He refuses to interpret a fall as proof that the relationship has ended. In every nefilah, he searches for the concealed address of the One who is carrying him through it. He does not deny the darkness. He denies the darkness the authority to define what is ultimately true.

This is the mature form of ye'ush de-kedushah. Ordinary despair says that there is no source of help. Holy despair says that there is no source of help in me as an independent power. The first closes prayer; the second makes prayer

possible. The first concludes that nothing can be done; the second asks Hashem to reveal the action that belongs to this moment. The words may sound similar, but they face in opposite directions. The distinction is essential. A person in psychological crisis, addiction, danger, or overwhelming pain may need concrete assistance, treatment, protection, and the loving intervention of other people. Those forms of help are not rivals to trust in Hashem; they are among the vessels through which His help arrives.

“I cannot save myself” does not mean “I must isolate myself.” It means that I stop demanding that salvation originate within the closed circle of the self, and I become willing to receive it in the form Hashem sends.

Yonah and the Descent Into the Hidden Chamber

The book of Yonah is read on Yom HaKippurim because Yonah’s journey enacts the descent from knowing into holy unknowing. At the beginning, Yonah appears to understand the Divine calculation. He knows the likely result of his mission, fears the consequences of Nineveh’s repentance for Israel, and attempts to escape the role assigned to him. His flight is not simple ignorance. It is the resistance of a prophet whose knowledge has become an argument against obedience. Then the storm comes. The sea dismantles Yonah’s calculation by placing him inside a reality he cannot

manage. While the sailors labor above, Yonah descends to yarketei hasefinah, the recesses of the ship, and sleeps.

His sleep can be read as avoidance, yet within the spiritual architecture of the day it also anticipates surrender. The prophet who tried to run through knowledge is brought beneath knowledge. He descends into the ship, into the sea, and into the fish, each chamber deeper and narrower than the last. Only from the belly of the fish does Yonah pray. The prayer does not arise when his plan remains available. It arises when every route of escape has closed and life itself is received as an impossibility. The descent becomes a concealed Kodesh HaKodashim: a place outside ordinary human control from which the word of Hashem can be heard again.

Beneath Knowledge

Yonah is returned to the same mission, but he no longer returns as its author. He becomes its bearer. The Kohen Gadol and Yonah therefore mirror one another. The Kohen Gadol enters inward into the most sacred chamber; Yonah is cast outward into sea and wilderness. One wears white garments and follows an exact service; the other is stripped of direction and swallowed by a creature of the deep. Yet both arrive at the limit of adam. Both enter a place where mastery cannot survive, and both emerge as messengers of life for

others. This is also why sleep appears as a charged image in the avodah of surrender.

Chizkiyahu turns his face to the wall when confronted with a decree of death. Yonah descends and sleeps while the ship breaks around him. Sleep suspends the managing self. It resembles death, but it also permits a renewal that conscious effort cannot manufacture. On Yom HaKippurim, the white kittel, the withdrawal from eating and bodily mastery, and the closing gates of Ne'ilah bring the worshipper to a similar threshold. We do not abandon action; we allow Hashem to perform the surgery that action cannot perform upon itself.

Yom HaKippurim and Purim

The movement toward holy unknowing reaches beyond Yom HaKippurim into Purim. The well-known relationship between Yom Kippurim and Purim is more than a play on their names. Both days disclose salvation after the collapse of ordinary reason. On Yom HaKippurim, the person relinquishes food, comfort, possession, and the claims of the accomplished self. On Purim, the mind relinquishes its demand to understand the hidden governance of Hashem. The inui of one day and the oneg of the other open toward the same secret: life is received most deeply when the self ceases to treat itself as life's source. In the Purim story, every visible calculation points toward catastrophe.

The decree has been sealed, the machinery of empire has been activated, and Hashem's name does not appear in the Megillah. Salvation emerges through reversals that no character controls as a whole. Mordechai's knowing is therefore an *ad delo yada*, a knowing that makes room for what it cannot know. He acts with extraordinary courage and precision, yet he does not possess the script by which those actions will succeed. The phrase *lo yode'a kelum* can be read as the initials of *kli*. The person who knows nothing becomes a vessel. This does not glorify stupidity. It describes the emptied knowing of someone who has learned, acted, and then released the demand that reality conform to his comprehension.

Supported in the Fall

A full cup cannot receive. The mind filled with its own explanations cannot notice the hidden path of salvation unfolding through events it would never have chosen. The white simplicity of Yom HaKippurim and the intoxicated unknowing of Purim thus share an inner innocence. This innocence is not *naïveté*. It is what remains after sophistication has exhausted its claim to sovereignty. The person returns to childlikeness without becoming childish. He can think, discern, and act, yet at the root he rests upon Hashem as a child rests upon the one carrying it. This sheds light on the words *selichah*, *mechilah*, and *kapparah*. Their

initials form samech, the letter and root of support, of being upheld.

Forgiveness is not merely the deletion of a record. It is the discovery that even while we were falling, we were not falling outside the One who sustains existence. To receive selichah, mechilah, and kapparah is to discover ourselves supported at the very point where self-support failed.

The Kav of Hope Within Holy Despair

The most daring claim in this entire path is that hope is born from the proper exhaustion of our own hopes. Human hope usually imagines a preferred future and then clings to it as the condition for trust. We hope that a particular door will open, a particular pain will end, a particular identity will be restored. These hopes are natural and often holy, but they can quietly become demands that Hashem save us only through the future we have designed. When those designs collapse, the person feels that hope itself has disappeared. In truth, one form of hope has disappeared: the hope produced and controlled by the self.

Beneath it waits a deeper kivuy, a line of longing that does not dictate its destination. Ten tikvah tovah limyachalim lach asks Hashem to give good hope to those who hope toward Him.

The object of the deepest hope is not a scenario. It is Hashem Himself. The language of the kav gives this insight a cosmic dimension. After the tzimtzum and the emergence of the chalal hapanui, the ray of Infinite light enters the apparent emptiness. The empty space is not filled by denying its emptiness; it becomes the place into which the line can extend. So too within the soul, chisaron becomes receptive when it stops trying to disguise itself as fullness.

Hope Without a Script

The person says: I do not possess the light, I cannot manufacture the light, and I cannot command its form. Precisely then, the empty place becomes available to the kav Or Ein Sof. Holy despair is therefore not the death of hope but the clearing of its counterfeit. It releases the demand that my private imagination define redemption. Once that demand loosens, I can become a vessel for the hope Hashem is directing toward creation. My life is no longer sustained only by what I can foresee. It is sustained by the Divine desire that called me into being and continues to call me toward a future I cannot yet name.

This is the shared light of the Ba'al HaSulam and Reb Osher Freund. The Ba'al HaSulam exposes the will to receive that tries to make even salvation serve the self. Reb Osher trains the person to endure the present breath without escaping

into self-made control. Together they teach that chisaron is not a sealed emptiness. It is the opening through which the kav enters.

The person's admission "I cannot" becomes truthful only when it continues, "and therefore I turn to You."

From Neilah to the Sukkah

At Ne'ilah, the day contracts into a final simplicity. The gates are closing, the body is emptied, and language itself is reduced to the repeated cry Hashem Hu HaElokim. After a day filled with confession and liturgy, we arrive at words that contain no account of the self. We do not explain who we have become or what we deserve. We name the only Reality that remains when every claim has been exhausted. The final shofar is the sound that follows this surrender. It is not articulate speech but breath forced through a narrow passage, a cry born where words end. It resembles the first cry of a child emerging from the concealed womb of binah.

Ne'ilah closes around the worshipper like a gan na'ul, yet the closure becomes birth. The person who entered the day carrying an old identity emerges without a completed explanation, alive again because life has been given again. From that cry we move almost immediately toward the sukkah. We begin to build because holy helplessness is never the final instruction to remain collapsed. Once the illusion of

self-sufficiency has been surrendered, action returns in a gentler form. We take boards, branches, tools, and measurements. We build a fragile dwelling and call it the shelter of faith. The sukkah does not deny vulnerability; it turns vulnerability into a place of joy.

This sequence protects the teaching from every distortion. Yom HaKippurim does not teach that effort is meaningless, that wrongdoing carries no responsibility, or that despair should become a permanent home. It teaches that effort reaches truth only when it knows it cannot crown itself. Responsibility becomes redemptive when it is joined to compassion. Despair becomes holy only when it empties the false god of self-reliance and immediately opens into prayer. The tohu of the day must be held within kelim de-tikkun, and those vessels must carry us back into life. We therefore enter the day as the Kohen Gadol entered: prepared, responsible, and stripped of ownership.

The Fragile Dwelling of Faith

We enter as Yonah entered the depths: unable to escape the mission and unable to complete it through our own wisdom. We enter with the Ba'al HaSulam's recognition of chisaron and with Reb Osher's fidelity to the breath in which Hashem is present. We bring our learning, our failures, our repair, our longing, and even our confusion, and we surrender the claim that any of them can force open the gates. At the innermost

point, all that remains is the prayer of the impoverished person: Tefillah le'ani ki ya'atof velifnei Hashem yishpoch sicho. The poor person pours out speech because he has nothing with which to bargain.

His poverty becomes his honesty, and his honesty becomes his closeness. He does not ask to be excused from becoming a person. He asks to be recreated as a person who knows that every strength, every breath, and every beginning comes from Hashem. Then the answer *salachti kidvarecha* can be heard in its full depth. Hashem does not merely permit us to continue after failure. He reveals that the place we experienced as the end of ourselves can become the beginning of relationship. The heart of *tohu* becomes the chamber of compassion. The collapse of private hope becomes the opening of Divine hope. The creature who has nothing discovers that it is being carried, and because it is being carried, it can rise, repair, build, and rejoice.

May we be *zocheh* to the *tohu de-kedushah* that comes after faithful *tikkun*, to the mature unknowing that is born from true wisdom, and to the *ye'ush de-kedushah* that empties us of false mastery without emptying us of courage. May we receive the strength to repair what we have damaged, the compassion to distinguish the soul from its failures, and the humility to ask for help in the form in which Hashem sends it. Through *selichah*, *mechilah*, and *kapparah*, may we discover the *samech* that has always upheld us, hear the word *salachti*, and carry its light.



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