



A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA

מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

עשי"ת – יום הכפורים

In the opening *tefillah* of Yom Kippur, Kol Nidrei, we recite the Shecheyanu blessing. R' Isser Zalman Meltzer *zatzal* notes that, in addition to reciting this blessing in honour of the special *mitzvos* associated with the day, as with all other Yomim Tovim, there is another reason for it. We thank Hashem for bringing us to this significant stage, where we can merit forgiveness and atonement through the profound opportunity of Yom Kippur. He emphasised that, given the importance of the day and the special gift we have received, we must ensure that we utilise it effectively.

We further find this message in the prelude to Kol Nidrei, which begins with the *possuk*, אור זרע לצדיק, ולישרי לב שמחה, *light is sown for the righteous; and gladness for the upright of heart* (Tehillim 97:11). The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* explains that this phrase conveys a significant lesson about how the *tzadikim* merit light even in Olam Hazeh and how everyone can utilise the *kedushah* of Yom Kippur to access this light. Although the Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 83b) derives that our world is dark like night, with the wicked roaming like forest beasts (see *Tehillim* 104:20), the *possuk* of אור זרע לצדיק emphasises that the righteous can experience light even in this dark world. Furthermore, ולישרי לב שמחה - the upright who have improved their *middos* can enjoy a joyful life here in this world. We begin the *tefillos* of Yom Kippur with this essential lesson, conveying the extraordinary holiness of Yom Kippur and helping individuals access this incredible light and joy even in the world we find ourselves in.

The Aseres Yemei Teshuvah are the most propitious time for an individual's repentance, as the Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 18a) explains the *possuk*, קראו בהיותו קרוב, דרשו ה' בהמצאו, *Seek Hashem when He can be found, call upon Him when He is near* (Yeshayah 55:6), to be referring to this time. This concept is echoed by the Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 2:6-7), where he writes: Although repentance and heartfelt crying are always fitting, they are especially appropriate during the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. During this time, these acts of repentance are accepted immediately, as the *possuk* states, "Seek Hashem...". The day of Yom Kippur is a day dedicated to repentance for both individuals and the community, marking the conclusion of forgiveness and atonement for Klal Yisroel.

The incredible gift of Yom Kippur being our chance for *teshuvah* and atonement is further highlighted by the Chinuch (#185). He explains that Hashem recognised that if a person's sins were allowed to accumulate, they could eventually reach a point where they would lose the merit to live because of their misdeeds. In His wisdom and kindness, Hashem established a fixed day each year to ensure our survival. This day is granted special powers to assist individuals in their repentance, and Hashem Himself supports those who are sincere in their quest for *teshuvah*. Indeed, for minor *aveiros*, Yom Kippur itself provides atonement. This day serves as an antidote to prevent a person from being overwhelmed by sins that could jeopardise their existence.

R' Itzele Blazer *zatzal* explains that the consequences for an individual who fails to take advantage of this golden opportunity to repent during these auspicious days can be very severe. The Shaarei

Teshuvah (1:2) compares this situation to a prisoner who remains behind after a prison breakout. When the warden discovers this foolish individual, he is punished because he did not use the chance to escape. The prisoner's failure to leave when he had the opportunity reflects his disregard for the crime he committed and a lack of concern for the punishment he deserves. Yom Kippur is our chance to escape the detrimental effects of the *aveiros* we have committed throughout the year. Those who do not take advantage of this opportunity show that they do not recognise the seriousness of their actions and the consequences they face.

With this in mind, an individual may begin to feel overwhelmed. Sincere and complete *teshuvah* involves reaching a point where, if faced with a similar temptation to sin, a person would definitely refrain from sinning (see Rambam, *Hilchos Teshuvah* 2:2). Achieving this level is not easy, and if we are particularly accountable for not using these days for repentance, shouldn't we be concerned?

However, the Balei Mussar offer an encouraging perspective, with there still being much we can accomplish on Yom Kippur. R' Yisroel Salanter *zatzal* writes (*Ohr Yisroel, Michtav* 7) that Yom Kippur is a day of great goodness. While ideally, a person should completely abandon sin, even the smallest improvement is invaluable and immensely beneficial. Everyone should strive to accept at least a minor *kabbalah* to improve in the future, thereby tapping into the great atonement that Yom Kippur offers.

R' Leib *zatzal* clarified that the essence of this small commitment is to ensure that we are in a state of growth and progress. He referenced the *possuk*, שָׁמוֹעַ שְׁמַעְתִּי אֶפְרַיִם מִתְנוּדָד, *I have indeed heard Ephraim shaking* (Yirmiyah 31:17). In these days, if one merely shakes themselves awake from their slumber and arouses a desire to improve their ways, they will merit the purification associated with Yom Kippur. Similarly, in the Chazzan's repetition of Neilah, we say, חֵן יְחֵן כִּי יִבְחַן לֵב עֶקֶב לְהַכִּינָה, and the Rosh Yeshiva explains this to mean that Hashem is gracious to a person when He discerns that the individual is making an effort and beginning to improve.

Let us strive to take full advantage of the remarkable opportunity that Yom Kippur presents for those seeking *teshuvah* and a closer connection to Hashem. While we may not achieve complete repentance for all our sins, it is essential that we commit to at least one sincere *kabbalah*. This commitment will help guide us on the path of personal growth and development, and may we all be *zoche* to be inscribed in the Book of Tzaddikim and to experience the everlasting light and joy that the righteous possess.