



A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA

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יום הכיפורים

אמר רבי עקיבא: אשְׁרֵיכֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל! לִפְנֵי מִי אַתֶּם מְטַהְרִין? וּמִי מְטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם? אַבִּיכֶם שְׁבַשְׁמִים! שְׁנֵאמַר: וְזָרְקְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מִיַּם טְהוֹרִים וּטְהַרְתֶּם. וְאָמַר: מִקְוֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל ה'. מָה מִקְוֵה מְטַהֵר אֶת הַטְּמְאִים, אִף הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְטַהֵר אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל. (גמ' יומא פה:)

R' Akiva said: Fortunate are you, Klal Yisroel! Before Whom do you cleanse yourselves? Who cleanses you? Your Father in Heaven! As it is stated: I will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you shall be cleansed. And it also says: The mikveh of Yisroel is Hashem. Just as a mikveh purifies the contaminated, so does HaKadosh Baruch Hu purify Klal Yisroel. (Gemara Yoma 85b)

The Masechta of Yoma, which outlines the service of Yom Kippur and its various laws, concludes with the above well-known saying of R' Akiva. This teaching can offer us direction and inspiration as we prepare for the upcoming Yom Tov of Yom Kippur, which will be further explained.

R' Akiva mentioned two elements in the *teshuvah* and purification process. Firstly, he referred to the concept of *מְטַהְרִין מִי אַתֶּם*, לִפְנֵי מִי, which pertains to a person cleansing themselves. This idea corresponds to the *possuk* of *מִקְוֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל ה'*. Just as the purification of the *mikveh* requires the initiative of the impure person to enter it, this *possuk* refers to repentance initiated by an individual. Secondly, R' Akiva spoke of a different aspect of purification, expressed in the phrase *וּמִי מְטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם*, which refers to Hashem Himself purifying Klal Yisroel. This parallels the *possuk* of *וְזָרְקְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם*, describing how Hashem sprinkles purifying water upon a sinner to cleanse them.

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* raises a compelling question: The exclamation of *אֲשֶׁרֵיכֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל! Fortunate are you, Klal Yisroel!* can be understood in the context of when Hashem purifies the sinner. However, should it not be expected that when a sinner takes the initiative to improve themselves, they should receive purification? What is unique about this purification that is advantageous for Klal Yisroel?

The answer to this question is found in the exceptional opportunity available to everyone on Yom Kippur. The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 18a) cites the *possuk* (*Yeshayah* 55:6): *קְרֹאֵהוּ, בְּהִמְצָאוֹ, דְּרָשׁוּ ה' בְּהִמְצָאוֹ, קְרֹאֵהוּ*, *Seek Hashem when He can be found, call upon Him when He is near*, explaining that this phrase refers to the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, which are the most propitious time for an individual's repentance. This concept is echoed by the Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 2:6-7), who writes: Although repentance and heartfelt crying are always fitting, they are particularly appropriate during the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. During this time, they 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.

With this understanding of the day's significance, the Rosh Yeshivah addresses the difficulty that has been raised. Yom Kippur is such an auspicious time that even forms of repentance which might not typically be accepted can have an impact on this day. Even when an individual takes the initiative to return to Hashem, the significance of Yom Kippur stands out. It does not require the usual elaborate

process; even a small step towards repentance can lead to atonement from Hashem. Klal Yisroel are fortunate to have Yom Kippur, a time when minor efforts can achieve great outcomes. This is emphasised in the words of R' Akiva: אָבִיכֶם שְׁבִשְׁמִים. Just as a father desires closeness with his son and readily accepts his repentance, so too does Hashem. During these precious days, He yearns for our closeness and will grant us forgiveness when we take the first step on the path of *teshuvah*.

For this reason, it is incredibly important for everyone to take advantage of this tremendous opportunity. The power of Yom Kippur offers a lighter path toward achieving purity, which places a responsibility on each individual to utilise it. Indeed, those who neglect this favourable chance for repentance and drawing closer to Hashem will face greater accountability than at any other time during the year. Rabbeinu Yonah (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 4:17) compares this concept to the punishment a sinner receives for not wearing *tzitzis*. White strings are easier to obtain than *techeiles*. Thus, one who does not wear white strings on his garment receives a harsher penalty than for not wearing *techeiles*.

The *possuk* (*Yeshayah* 52:2) states: הִתְנַעֲרִי מֵעָפָר קוֹמִי, *Shake the dust from yourself*, with the Zohar HaKadosh comparing this to a hen shaking itself from the dust. R' Leib *zatzal* explained this metaphor in the following way: When a hen gets dirty in the mud, it has two options for becoming clean: it can do so itself or with human assistance. If the hen shakes the dirt off on its own, it does so without any pain. However, if a person must intervene to clean the hen, achieving the same result will likely involve much pain and discomfort for the bird. Similarly, if a person takes the initiative to cleanse themselves from the dirt of sin, they can do so in a painless manner. On the other hand, if this cleansing is left to Hashem, who must awaken the sinner from their sinful ways, it may, unfortunately, lead to a painful experience, *chas veshalom*.

The Balei Mussar provide an inspiring and encouraging explanation regarding the uniqueness of Yom Kippur and the potential for even small steps to achieve purification. The *possuk* (*Yirmiyah* 31:17) states: שָׁמוֹעַ שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶפְרַיִם מִתְנוּדָד, *I have indeed heard Ephraim shaking*. During 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!

Let us take full advantage of the incredible opportunity that Yom Kippur offers, attaining purification in a straightforward way. Even if one is unable to achieve complete *teshuvah* for all their sins, they can still gain immensely from Yom Kippur by taking the first steps in the right direction. "Shaking" ourselves from the distractions of daily life, and committing to the path of rectifying our actions and returning to Hashem, we can experience the profound purification and closeness that Yom Kippur has the power to bring.

גִּמְרַ חֲתִימָה טוֹבָה

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