Awesome Days

ELUL * ROSH HASHANAH *
YOM KIPPUR * SUCCOT * SIMCHAT TORAH

How to make your experience of the High Holidays deeper, more meaningful, and infinitely rewarding

Avraham Sutton
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Rabbi Avraham Sutton, whom I have known for close to thirty years, studied Kabbalah at Yeshivat HaChayim VeHaShalom—Ateret Mordechai with Rabbi Mordechai Attieh, and years later studied with me for some time. Avraham is skilled in innovating Torah, and elucidating Midrash and Talmud woven together with the Zohar and the writings of the Arizal, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria of blessed memory. He is skilled at doing this even for an audience unfamiliar with these sacred teachings.

Sincerely,
Rabbi Moshe Schatz

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Rabbi Y.M. Morgenstern
Rosh Hayeshiva “Toras Chochom”
Jerusalem

BS”D
20th of Tevet 5770

I hereby laud the writings of Rav Avraham Sutton who is known for his books, filled with wondrous explanations of the Torah. This is surely a great privilege, similar to what the Mashiach told our Master the Baal Shem Tov when he asked him when he was coming. Mashiach answered, “When the wellsprings of your teachings overflow to such an extent that others too will also bring about elevations and unifications like you do.” It is thus certain that those who immerse themselves in these teachings are hastening the Redemption. May Hashem therefore bless the author to continue writing future works which will spread these teachings among all sincere learners of Torah. Until such time when heavenly favor and salvation will be aroused, with the coming of the Righteous Redeemer, soon, in our days, amen.

In honor of the Torah,
Yitzchak Meir Morgenstern
Foreword

God says: Days are coming, in which I shall cause a hunger to spread throughout the world. It shall not be a hunger for bread or a thirst for water, but a hunger to hear the word of God (Amos 8:11)

Our generation hungers for meaning. We have a growing need to discover the purpose of life, if there is one, and particularly the meaning of our individual lives. The sense of meaninglessness plaguing our generation takes its toll in daily tension, stress, alienation.

What can we do when the foundations of normal existence are eroding under our feet? Some of us are inspired to take a fresh look at the ancient teachings of the Torah, its prophets, and its sages. We have seen through other attempts to come to grips with the basic problems that face mankind right now, not only in Israel, but also South Africa, Russia, England, South America, and throughout the United States.

Ironically, though having been distant and alienated from Torah, many precious Jewish souls are now able to return in a way that nobody but God Himself could have arranged. A new era seems to be opening for the Jewish people and the world. These are not solitary occurrences of one or two individuals returning to the fold. On the contrary, a generation of sensitive and intelligent souls are coming back to their most ancient roots and realizing what it is to be Jewish. Many non-Jews are also bonding with Israel at this time of anguish and soul-searching.

Our rabbis tell us that the entire historical drama of our planet is now approaching its finale. The people of Israel must play an active role in their “mission impossible” of bringing mankind to a higher stage of moral and spiritual evolution. Now, in our time, the world’s eyes are turning more and more to the claim of Israel through its ancient Torah: There is One God who created the world and man with a purpose. As history accelerates towards its final stages, it is crucial for Israel and mankind to understand that purpose and to consciously participate in its fulfillment.

Mankind has always suffered from the problem of finding meaning and significance not only in actions but also in words and thoughts. We believe that the Torah was given through the Jewish people to solve this very problem. When understood properly, the Torah is the key to finding ultimate meaning in human existence—a big claim but one that can be substantiated. The Torah is the key to meaning and purpose for all human existence.

A huge problem arises, however, when the Torah is performed perfunctorily, without an understanding of the problems it has come to solve and the methods given to solve them. Torah is thus prevented from elevating the world and giving people the wisdom to solve the problems facing not only Israel but all humanity. The Torah is the key to meaning and purpose for all existence, but not when it is reduced to a system of thought which becomes disconnected from life and its problems.

How can we stand in prayer, say words filled with meaning, and truly believe what we are saying? How can the traditional words of the Siddur and the Machzor be used as openings to the Infinite and not, God forbid, as walls that prevent us from having even a minimal
awareness that we are speaking to someone real? There can be a short-circuit here, and if we are not honest about the problem, we shall never succeed in getting anywhere close to the most basic starting point of an answer.

In this small book I try to offer some direction based on the profound teachings of our prophets and sages. The main emphasis is on understanding teshuvah (return to our Source) in the most real and positive way. We must recognize that Hashem (God) is pouring down a powerful spirit of teshuvah into the soul of mankind. Whether we know it or not, this is what is going on in the depths of our soul. The lights of teshuvah are beaming down, sparkling into our souls—beckoning us to awaken from the sleep of this-world. And we are promised that, when we begin to hear that still small voice within us and respond to its call, Hashem too will respond in kind. For He told us:

If they seek Me with all their hearts and with all their souls, they will eventually find Me (Deuteronomy 4:27), for I am with them in the midst of their exile and alienation (Psalm 91:15). But they must search and examine themselves and return to Me (Lamentations 3:40).

Let us look at ourselves and admit that something is wrong. In the midst of a world breaking down all around us, either we come to the synagogue to say a bunch of words or we get fed up with the whole thing and leave altogether. I am from the generation that left. I left the synagogue to search for the answer to the ache in my soul. Years later, together with so many kindred souls, I came back and I found the treasure I sought.

* Please respect the sanctity of the contents of this book. Do not take it into any unclean place.

This book contains holy Names, especially the Holy Name, יְהֹוָה. The usage of any holy Name is a very serious matter. Never are they to be pronounced aloud, except in the prescribed way according to halakhah (Jewish Law).

In general we never pronounce the Ineffable Name יְהֹוָה as it is written. Rather when praying (and in a prescribed way, when learning Torah in lashon ha’kodesh—the prophetic language of the Torah), we say Adonai (Lord) and think the letters Yod and Heh and Vav and Heh. In all other cases, when encountering the Ineffable Name, we say either YKVK (Yod-Keh-Vav-Keh), or Hashem (The Name), or Havayah (Being).

The same rule applies to the Names אֶהְיֶה, יָהּ, אֵל, הִים, אֱ, הֵינוּ, צְבָאוֹת, שַׁדַּי, אֲדֹנָי. When not praying or learning Torah, we change each name slightly, out of respect for its sanctity, and say: Ekeyeh (I will be), Kah (God), Kel (Almighty, All-Loving God), Elokim (God, Master of all forces), Elokenu (our God), Tzevakot ([Lord of] Hosts), Shakai (All-Sufficient One), and Adanut (Lord, Master).
Chapter 1

Preparing for the High Holidays

The King in the Field

The period from Elul to Simchat Torah is special for inner work, and hence inner transformation. When we take full advantage of it, we are given a perfect framework in which to direct and focus our energies, to connect to our highest purpose. We can more easily get in touch with the larger framework of eternity. Our small, human lives take on awesome, cosmic proportions, and we see our lives from the bird’s-eye-view of eternity. We appreciate every moment as a moment in eternity. We are put back on track. We can get in touch with who we really are, why we were born.

All Jewish prayer and inner work is based on the essential dynamic of entering into a core experience—meeting with our Self, meeting with God in the holy of holies of our beings—and then coming back out into our lives with something infinitely precious.

Elul, we are told, is the time when the King leaves His palace, so to speak, and travels throughout all the distant lands of His kingdom. The King is in the field, revealing Himself in the arena of our lives, accessible to all. This means that all of us can connect to Him regardless of how lost we may have been until now. Hashem (God, the Infinite One) is involved in our lives. Whether we know it or not, He is and was part of who we are. Elul is the time to remember our connection with the Creator, the One who loves us.

This divine closeness arouses in us a deep longing for the full revelation of the King. The letters of the word Elul form the acronym “Ani le’dodi ve’dodi li—I am my Beloved’s and my Beloved is mine” (Song of Songs 6:3). “I am my Beloved’s” means that I am ready to do whatever is necessary to enter into a relationship of total and utter merging with the Beloved. I have begun to see the King’s presence in the seemingly mundane aspects of my life. I am now ready to travel to the King, to meet the King in His palace.

I liken this to a certain red blood cell that was down in the foot sector of his route, the furthest he could be from the Heart (the Holy of Holies of the body). He had been left behind to perform first aid on a cut. Some of his fellow blood cells flowed out of the body and were lost, until he and a surviving remnant managed to stop the bleeding.

Having been away from the Heart for so long, he was faint, and needed to get back to get new life pumped into him. On his return trip, up through the legs and the pelvic area, on his way back to the lungs and the heart, the blood cell encountered numerous road blocks. At each one, the guards asked him to show his identity card, interrogated him as to the nature of his business, and asked him where he was headed. Anxious to return Home, our blood cell gladly offered his identification code and replied that he was on his way back from the feet to become oxygenated and revitalized in the lungs and heart. His goal was the Great Heart.

Perhaps because there was a war (sickness) in the body, the guards had to be extra careful to check each and every blood cell, lest an infected cell approach too close to the vital organs and cause great damage. But there were other guard posts that had already been taken over by the enemy (virus), and the guards at these road blocks refused entry to even
the healthiest blood cells! In fact, they tried to convince all these tired blood cells that there is no Heart! And yet, however fatigued and increasingly desperate our blood cell was becoming, he knew where he had to go. The existence and reality of the Heart are encoded into his very being.

Exhausted almost beyond endurance, he finally reaches the first entrance to the Source (the upper right chamber of the Heart), when he hears: "Welcome my brave little worker. You have done well. Because of such as you, the body survives. Now finally rest as I flow you to this lower chamber from which to pump you gently to one of the miraculous mikveh-baths, the lungs, where you will be relieved of your burden of CO₂ that you have labored to deliver, and where you will be blessedly restored in a joyous bath of O₂, the element of your new life. Then, as your color returns to the brightest of red, I will flow you again back to My left chambers, first to the upper, for our intimate reunion, and then to the lower chamber, from which, again, you will be sent forth to bring vital nourishment to all the parts of My Kingdom."

After blissfully passing through the Heart, he looks back and swears, "I will never forget You! I will tell the whole body about You!"

Going to the palace of the King on Rosh Hashanah is quite similar. We want to enter into that central, core, middle-of-our-being experience, to rise up and out of the system of concentric circles that constitutes our normal sphere of life. We want to encounter infiniteness. When we reach the King's throne room, the outer circles disappear, at least for the moment. Immediately the King shows us how our little human lives look from heaven.

In a split second He reveals that He was always with us. It just had to seem that He was far away. At that moment, the seemingly limited space of the throne room opens up into a breathtaking vastness, the vastness of God's love.

At any point during the prayers of these awesome days, we may ask to go further in and/or higher up. We yearn to get to the core and to remain there until we are told we must leave. While there we can try to see our entire life, and we can succeed. We also try to understand as much as possible. Sometimes we may not feel anything immediately, or we may not sense the clarity for which we hoped. In that case we need to be patient enough to stay there. If we do not hurry away we can be assured that when we do leave, we will be much closer than when we arrived.

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1 Special thanks to my beloved friend Dr. Pesach Goodley of blessed memory for helping me with the anatomy of this parable (www.drgoodley.com). Anatomically it is based on the fact that the flow of blood throughout the body normally completes its cycle (from the lungs and heart into every part of the body and back again) every two-three minutes. The blood's job throughout this amazing journey: to distribute oxygen (O₂) to the entire body, and to pick up and deliver carbon dioxide (CO₂) back to the lungs. In this way, we thus constantly breathe in O₂, and breathe out CO₂.

On its return trip, the blood thus first enters the upper right chamber of the heart. From there, it is pumped to the lower right chamber, and then to the lungs, where it releases its load of CO₂ and receives a fresh new load of O₂. Vitalized and oxygenated, the blood flows back into the heart (first into the upper left chamber, and then into the lower left chamber). Fully invigorated, it now leaves the heart to distribute life-giving oxygen to the entire body. As noted, this vital circulation takes place approximately every two-three minutes!

The most miraculous thing about this is that, unlike all the other cells of the body, the red blood cell has no nucleus—the repository of DNA in all other cells. So, how does the red blood cell survive for its allotted thirty days? The Torah's answer is, "Ki nefesh ha'basar ba'dam—for the soul of the flesh is in the blood!" (Leviticus 17:11), and "Ki nefesh kol basar ba'dam—for the soul of all flesh is its blood" (Leviticus 17:14). In yet another place, it is written, "Ki ha'dam hu ha'nefesh—for the blood is the soul" (Deuteronomy 12:23). In the Torah, these verses are the source for the prohibition against eating/drinking the blood of any animal. In every case connected with blood, the word that is used for "soul" is nafshe. The same applies to man. Man's nafshe is said either to be his blood, or in his blood. One way or the other, the nafshe is directly associated with the blood. The blood is thus the link between the soul and the body. Specifically, it is the nafshe (the lowest aspect of the soul that comes to rest in the body) that resides within the blood.
On *Rosh Hashanah* we come to the palace to honor the King, to acknowledge His sovereignty and accept upon ourselves the yoke of His Kingship. During the seven intervening days of *teshuvah* (return), we prepare and purify ourselves even more so that we can enter into private audience with the King on *Yom Kippur*. During *Sukkot* we join with those who have been doing the same inner work and we celebrate together with the King in the royal ballroom. On *Simchat Torah* we dance and rejoice in ecstatic union with our fellow souls and with the King. After the holidays, we leave the palace and return to our lives. A profound change has taken place. We will never again be the same.

**Elul**

Elul is the last month of the year. It is like the last bus that picks up everyone who has lagged behind. We thus have a tradition that every day of the month of Elul can be used to repair all the corresponding days of every other month during the entire year. This applies especially to *davening* (praying). Prayer is our way of entering within to the deepest communion with our Beloved. It is our *fix* for the day. But who can say that he really prayed with his whole heart? That he truly entered with, into a living relationship, every time they spoke to God? As a result, the prayers we prayed at those times when we just mouthed the words are considered dead prayers.

During Elul, however, we have a chance to lift up all those dead prayers. On the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc., of Elul, for instance, we can make a point of really praying from the heart, with the intention of fixing whatever we did wrong on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th etc. of every month of the year.

The same applies to the last week in Elul. Sunday of that week corresponds to all the Sundays of the entire year. Even if we were lax and failed to utilize all 52 of those Sundays, we can still redeem all of them with one consciously lived Sunday in the last week of Elul. The same holds true for each of the other days.

*Maariv/Arvit* (the Evening Prayer) of *Erev Rosh Hashanah* (the last day in Elul) can fix, redeem, and rectify each lost *Maariv* of the entire year. It can literally take all those prayers that were too weak and tired to make it up to heaven, and bring them before the Holy One. Ditto for the last *Shachrit* (daily Morning Prayer) and the last *Minchah* (Afternoon Prayer). How awesome! In one prayer we have the opportunity to fix, redeem, rectify, elevate, and transform all the prayers of the entire year.

Based on this, the *Sefardim* say a special preparatory prayer even as late as the night of *Yom Kippur*. Just after *Kol Nidre*, but before *Barekhu*, we humbly admit:

> Master of the world, we are dust, and we lack even the most basic *binah* (understanding) that is fitting for a human being. We are sorely incapable of grasping how great You are...and we are therefore sorely lacking in our ability to pray to You... But despite all our shortcomings, we ask: May it be Your Will... that You accept this prayer that we pray before You now at this time... May it rise up with the prayers of all Your other children...And may all the prayers that we have prayed throughout the year(s) but which have been pushed aside due to lack of sincere intention rise up before You today as well.
The Elul of History

No Elul, no Rosh Hashanah, no day, no hour, and no moment is ever the same, nor should be taken for granted. Especially this Elul! We are living in such a heavy time, a time pregnant with the possibility of world redemption. On the outer level of history, of course, we can never be sure. Maybe it is just another birth-pang in a long series. In the end redemption will come, like the long awaited birth at the end of nine long months of pregnancy. But which birth-pang is this? Is the cervix fully dilated? Has the baby’s head entered the birth canal? Is there at least an intellectual awareness that we are in the throes of messianic redemption?

Whatever the answers to the above questions on the outer stage of history, the truth is that on the inside level it all depends on us. That is, all the changes that we are looking for will not happen out there until they first happen inside. This means that the redemption will come through our heart, our consciousness. For we, our neshamot (souls), are the inner reason that Hashem created the world. The world exists only as a stage upon which we can meet Hashem in a very special way. What do we need to look for as the redemption process accelerates? Openings in our consciousness, knowings, realizations (at first, ever so faint). Eventually the stirrings will get so strong that we will look at each other and say, “Do you feel what I feel? Do you hear that? Is that the still small voice of Eliyahu? Is that his shofar that I hear? It’s starting to break through into physical time and space! The world is beginning to shake.”

Every Elul of our lives is especially significant, for the truth is that we are in the Elul of history. Of course it is true that we are also in the Pesach of history, the Shavuot of history, the Chanukah of history, etc. But we are no less in the Elul of history, when Hashem is preparing us for the ultimate Day of Judgment, hayom hagadol vehanora, the great awesome Rosh Hashanah of history.

The Judgment of Rosh Hashanah

The judgment of Rosh Hashanah takes place in the heavenly court. How does judgment work?

The living and the dead are judged every year on Rosh Hashanah. Even those of us who are alive are judged as to whether we are living or dead. (Even if we have been dead, we can come to life! We never give up hope.)

In truth we are judged every day and even every moment of our lives. If this were not true, if there were no objective reality outside our own egocentric world where our actions are judged and weighed on the most perfect and precise scales of justice, our actions would have no meaning. Hashem gives us tests (of various levels and magnitudes of difficulty) as indices or yardsticks, so that we can judge ourselves and know where we are holding. Thus we can determine what needs immediate attention and correction, or what needs patience. The small tests are a preparation for Rosh Hashanah, when we are judged by the heavenly tribunal. Judgment before the heavenly tribunal is preparation for the Day of Judgment we all face at the conclusion of our individual sojourn in this world. That Day of Judgment is preparation for the Final Judgment at the end of history as we know it.

Judgment is NOT seen as a bad thing in Judaism, or even as something to avoid. Judgment is like a bright light that pierces through all our cloudy thinking and weak rationalizations. Although we might experience the light as painful at first, it is definitely for our benefit and
we therefore welcome it. In Rav Aryeh Kaplan’s essay, “Immortality and the Soul,” he writes:\(^2\)

Imagine standing naked before God, with your memory wide open, completely transparent without any jamming mechanism or reducing valve to diminish its force. You will remember everything you ever did, and see it in a new light. You will see it in the light of the unshaded spirit or, if you will, in God’s own light that shines from one end of creation to the other. The memory of every good deed and mitzvah will be the most sublime of pleasures, as our tradition speaks of Olam Haba (the World-to-Come).

But your memory will also be open to all the things of which you are ashamed. They cannot be rationalized away or dismissed. You will be facing yourself, fully aware of the consequences of all your deeds.

Just as we immerse in a mikveh on the day before Rosh Hashanah to purify ourselves of anything that might stand between us and Hashem, so that we can stand naked before Him with nowhere to hide, so also when we pass from this world we go through a kind of mikveh before we are ushered in before the heavenly tribunal. We go through the mikveh process to cleanse ourselves, to remove the outer layer, which is our ego. In this way we let down our defenses so that we can face Hashem willingly in the most honest and most humble way possible. According to our tradition, the mikveh through which we pass in the soul world is a mikveh of fire. For the tzadikim who lived righteous lives, it is the most pleasurable experience, likened to the pleasure of entering a steaming hot bath after taking a cold shower.

**Rosh Hashanah—To Cry or Not To Cry?**

Despite the fact that Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment, we do not enumerate our sins on this day. We do not concentrate on what is wrong with us. On the contrary, the main work on Rosh Hashanah is the acknowledgment and acceptance of Hashem’s sovereignty. That is, we don’t concentrate on ourselves as much as we concentrate on Hashem as the One who directs the events of our lives, the One who is always there/here with us. How does this work?

In the book of Nechemiah we are told that when we returned from Babylon to build the Second Temple, Ezra stood on a large platform and read from the Torah. It was Rosh Hashanah, and he was reading the portion in the Torah about the mitzvot (commandments) associated with this day. As he was reading, however, all the people started to cry, sob, and weep. This was a natural reaction, since it brought to mind how far from the Torah they had come.

But Ezra and Nechemiah told them, “This is a holy day to Hashem your God. Do not mourn and do not weep... Go home. Eat choice meats and drink sweet wines. Send portions to those who have nothing prepared. For this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved. Let Hashem’s joy be your strength! And all the people went their way to eat and to drink, to send portions [to those in need], and to celebrate joyously, because they understood what they had been told” (Nechemiah 8:9-12).

Clearly, according to this, Rosh Hashanah is not a day to cry and to bemoan how far we have drifted from Hashem and His Torah. It is a day to feel that despite anything we may have done, Hashem is truly close to us.

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\(^2\) Kaplan, "Immortality and the Soul" in If You Were God, NCSY, 1982, p. 31.
The principle is that yes, certain actions that we have done in the past or constantly do in the present (and the feelings they elicit) tend to make us feel closed off from God. They literally prevent us from feeling God's closeness when we need it most. Deep down, we don’t feel worthy of standing in God’s presence. We put ourselves in jail by closing ourselves off from any direct awareness of God. But this is based on the false assumption that God is outside, whereas the truth is that God is INSIDE. Nevertheless, this is what happens psychologically.

Given this psychological reality, we might mistakenly think that the first thing God would want to do would be to expose us in our lowliness. No! The first thing He wants is for us to know how much He loves us. He wants us to know that He is still with us, despite anything we may have done. This is why we are told not to feel sad on Rosh Hashanah. Instead of concentrating on how unworthy we are, we make a subtle internal move to break OUT of our self-imposed imprisonment and INTO an awareness of God. That is, our own little story is temporarily thrust into the background, while the awesome reality of a great loving Being who cares about us is thrust into the forefront of consciousness.

Coming to the truth is often a paradoxical process, so we shouldn’t be surprised that there is another face to this process.

The Ari (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, 1534-1572) said that one should be able to express the deepest of emotions, including crying, on this day as well. As we shall see in a moment, the resolution is that we don’t cry for our sins (i.e., how disconnected we are or have been from Hashem) on Rosh Hashanah, but rather from the deepest place of connectedness to God. Here are the words of Rav Chayim Vital in Shaar HaKavanot, quoting his master, the Ari:

According to the Zohar, one should not mention any sin on Rosh Hashanah. There are, however, seemingly contradictory statements in the Zohar concerning the recital of Viduy (Confession) on Rosh Hashanah. In one place it seems to imply that it is forbidden to detail one’s sins; while in another place the opposite seems to be the case. [In view of this] my master (the Ari) used to confess his mistakes completely silently, in a whisper that was not even audible to his own ears. He thus explained that the first statement in the Zohar meant only that it is forbidden to speak of them [sins] audibly, not silently. Nevertheless, even silently, he would only confess in between the sets of shofar blasts that were blown sitting [after the Torah reading and before praying the Mussaf Amidah]. It is then that the Satan [the heavenly accuser] is confused by the shofar blasts, and is therefore unable to pay enough attention to accuse us. It is then that the words of our confessions rise up together with the blasts of the shofar [to sweeten all judgments].

My master was also accustomed to cry profusely during the Rosh Hashanah prayers. [He cried] despite the fact that Rosh Hashanah is a holiday [on which it is forbidden to be sad]! Needless to say, on Yom Kippur, he cried even more. My master of blessed memory even told us the following: “If crying does not ‘fall’ on a person during these days, this is a sign that his neshamah (soul) is not fit and whole.” He added that some people [the teachers of the generation] are judged on the first day, which is called dina kashya (stringent judgment); while others [the rest of us] are judged on the second day, which is dina rafya (softened or sweetened judgment). The Holy One has compassion on these [the second group], and He therefore judges them more leniently. Finally, he said, “When a great crying falls on a person [suddenly] during either of these

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3 Shaar HaKavanot, Drushey Rosh Hashanah, s.v. bekhol yod yemei teshuvah, p. tzadi in Attieh, Jerusalem edition.
days, during the prayers, this is a sign that he is being judged at that very moment Above, whether on the first day or on the second.”

The main inner work of Rosh Hashanah is the removal of all the outer layers that prevent us from coming close to Hashem. This is the concept of being completely humble before God on Rosh Hashanah, by removing the ego on all levels—mental, psychological, and emotional.

Rosh Hashanah is a time to come into a light of divine justice. It is a blinding light, but it is filled with love. It is therefore a time of choosing consciousness, after having been unconscious for so long. It is the complete opening of the heart. Being able to feel that light is a privilege. Crying from that deep place of knowing that we are being judged—that is the kind of crying that is permitted on Rosh Hashanah. That is what the Ari meant when he spoke about a neshamah (soul) being fit and whole.

The tears that we should cry on Rosh Hashanah are tears of liberation and freedom from all that has held us back from getting to our essence. We have this sacred, protected, inside time to peel away all the layers, the masks that we wear, and reveal our authentic self.

We learn from all this that there are two kinds of tears. A person can cry over sins—for deficiencies, what we lack. But in the deeper level of crying, the tears are being released from a place of total connectedness to the awesomeness of the Holy One. We have an awareness of consciousness, a purity of thought, a realization, a knowing that Hashem is the Director of our lives, that He cares about us. We might call it a “Let go, let God” kind of crying.

The judgment of Rosh Hashanah is thus not what most people imagine it to be, i.e., punishment. The judgment is more like a measure—a measure of where we are relative to who we really are (our neshamah) and what we are really capable of. On Rosh Hashanah we are given glimpses of who and what we really are, can be, could be, and will be. It is in this context that we are to see the challenges that we are encountering. It is all part of the package of who we are.

Simply put, on Rosh Hashanah Hashem shines a new light into us that has the ability to awaken the deepest potential sleeping in us. This divine light shines fully into every aspect of our being. In doing so, it allows us to be reborn.

Clearly, such an intense revelation has the power to bring us to tears—to be washed in the cleansing waters of hearts overflowing with thanks and awe.

Departing Egypt on Rosh Hashanah
In all Sefardic congregations, we begin the Rosh Hashanah evening prayer with Achot Ketanah, a beautiful poem about Am Yisrael and the Shekhinah. Following this, we say Psalm 81. This psalm begins, “LaMenatzei’ach—Dedicated to the One who grants victory [to Israel even] through suffering.” It was sung in the Beit HaMikdash every fifth day of the week, as well as on Rosh Hashanah. Its main theme is the Exodus from Mitzrayim (Egypt).

The superscription reads: LaMenatzei’ach al haGitit leAsaph. A menatzei’ach (pronounced: men-a-tzei-ach) is a conductor. LaMenatzei’ach is therefore usually translated “To the Chief
Musician,” “For the Choirmaster,” “For the Conductor.” According to many, “this title attached to fifty five psalms...is a musical direction to the precentor or leader of the Temple choir.”

Netzach, or the verb le’natze‘ach, actually means “to be victorious,” “to overcome,” or “to command.” Accordingly, the menatze‘ach is the Maestro, the man who orchestrates all the individual instruments and voices under his command and transforms them into a symphonic whole, a tightly bound organization, a single unified body that pulses to the same beat. But this definition itself leads us to the conclusion that the ultimate menatze‘ach is none other than Hashem Himself. Clearly, this is the reason that Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch consistently renders LaMenatze‘ach as “To the One who grants victory.”

Al ha’Gitit means literally, “upon the wine-press.” We have rendered it, “through suffering.” In his commentary to Psalm 8, Rabbi Hirsch explains: “The word gat is used...as an expression for grievous catastrophes...This figure of speech, however, indicates that what is meant is only apparent destruction, while in reality the painful, bruising pressure such as occurs during the wine-pressing operation does not destroy but only brings out all the fine and noble essence that was locked within the crushed grape. Thus, the superscription of al ha’Gitit would characterize the content of a psalm as a meditation upon the ennobling effect of those afflictions decreed by God for our moral betterment...”

Similar to the image of the wine-press, the Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 36:1) likens Israel to an olive tree. Just as an olive must be crushed in a press to bring forth its oil, so the purpose for which Israel suffers persecution is in order to perfect it and eventually shine its light to all mankind.

Yes, suffering ennobles man, but only when he is able to use to it transcend himself and experience reality on a completely different level. This ladder has many rungs. It begins with knowing of the existence of the Menatzeach. Once that realization hits us, we may never be the same. For we will realize that we have been perceiving only a minute fraction of reality. We see that beyond the information (and the pain) we can access with our five senses, a vast world of meanings and interconnections exists, orchestrated by none other than the Grand Master. Therefore nothing “just happens,” but rather all is part of a single unified plan for mankind and creation. This is the meaning of verse 11, “I am Hashem your God who lifts you up out of the land of Mitzrayim.” Mitzrayim is a double form of the noun metzarim, the narrow straits and double bind constrictions that hold us in bondage. Our exodus from these double binds is through the power of knowing “I am Hashem your God.”

Again, this is like a great ladder which we must alight at the bottom and ascend. In this psalm, this ascent begins in verses 4-5, which allude to Hashem’s judgment on Rosh Hashanah. As The Day of Judgment, Rosh Hashanah teaches us that all suffering is decreed by God and is therefore for man’s ultimate good. Verse 6 takes us back in time to ancient Mitzrayim where Yoseph suffered prior to being released from prison and catapulted to the position of Pharaoh’s Chief Advisor over all Egypt. Verses 7 jumps ahead to Israel’s bondage in Mitzrayim and the Exodus therefrom. Verse 8 reminds us how Hashem continued saving us in the Wilderness, first at the Red Sea, then at Marah, and finally at Massah U’Merivah. Verses 9-11 call upon us to internalize the lesson learned from those experiences, namely, that it is Hashem alone who fulfills our deepest longings. Verses 12-14 put the finger on the exact reason behind Israel’s suffering in its long, tear-laden exile among the nations of the world. Verses 15-17 speak of what would happen if Israel could transcend the cycle of sin and suffering.

4 Rabbi Avraham Davis, Metzudot Avraham on Psalms.
5 The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 14a-b) states that Yoseph’s release from prison was on Rosh Hashanah. The connection is not just chronological, however, but intrinsic, as again, Rosh Hashanah is all about being released from our personal and collective Mitzrayims.
Psalm 81

When we realize the fairness of Hashem’s judgments, we are ennobled by the suffering we must endure:

(1) Dedicated to the One who grants victory [to Israel even] through suffering. A song by Asaph: (2) Sing joyously to God, our innermost strength. Stir yourselves to [thank] the God of Yaacov. (3) Take up a cutting-chant, sound a tambourine, a pleasant harp, and a lyre. (4) Blast a shofar at the beginning of the month, when [the New Moon is] yet concealed, in honor of [Rosh Hashanah] our day of celebration. (5) It is a law for Israel, for [on this day] the God of Yaacov [sits in] judgment.

Yoseph’s suffering preceded his elevation to the highest office under Pharaoh in Mitzrayim:

(6) He ordained it in remembrance of Yehoseph when he [was released from the dungeon on Rosh Hashanah and] went forth to rule the land of Mitzrayim. [And Yoseph said:] I have heard a language I never knew.

The Nation of Israel suffered terrible oppression before the Exodus:

(7) [God says: Many years later, on the same day, I began freeing Yoseph’s people from the servitude of carrying bricks and the menial labor of boiling lime;] I removed their shoulder from the burden; their hands were freed from the kiln.

Hashem continued saving us at the Red Sea, at Marah, and at the waters of Merivah—all so that we would recognize Him and know that it is He alone who fulfills our deepest longings:

(8) And I continued rescuing you when you called out in distress [on the shores of the Red Sea]. When you complained [against Me at Marah], I did not pay attention, but answered you. [True] I tested you [but I did not fail to bring forth water from the cliff when you complained] at the waters of Merivah, selah. (9) O My people, hear Me when I admonish you. O Israel, hear/listen well to what I tell you: (10) Let no alien power reside within you, and do not bow down before any external force. (11) I am Hashem your God who lifts you up out of the land of Mitzrayim. Open your mouth wide, [express your deepest longing, pray for the ultimate redemption] and I will fulfill it.

The real reason behind all our suffering: we fail to hear Him calling us:

(12) But My people did not hear/heed My voice. Israel did not wish [to submit] to Me. (13) So I sent them away to follow their hearts’ fantasies, to pursue their own schemes [and to suffer the consequences]. (14) Still, if [at any time] My people would hear/listen to Me, if Israel would pursue My pathways,

If we could only transcend the cycle of sin and suffering:

(15) I would immediately subdue their enemies and turn My hand back against their oppressors. (16) [I would turn My hand against] those who hate God, [against those] who deny His Existence. Then their [time would come to blot out their memory forever, whereas Israel’s] time would extend forever. (17) [O Israel] I would then feed [the least of you] from the purest wheat. I would miraculously satiate you with honey that flows from dry rock.

"Blast a shofar at the beginning of the month, when [the New Moon is] yet concealed, [in honor of Rosh Hashanah] our day of celebration. It is a law for Israel, for [on this day] the God of Yaacov [sits in] judgment” (Psalm 81:4-5).

The Talmud asks, “Which Festival occurs when the new moon is so slender as to be almost completely concealed? We must say, Rosh Hashanah." All other Festivals occur on the 15th

6 Betza 16a; Sanhedrin 11b.
day of the month, the day of the full moon. Only Rosh Hashanah occurs on Rosh Chodesh, “at the beginning of the month, when [the new moon is] yet concealed.” However, unlike all other new moons, on which Hallel is sung, on Rosh Hashanah, Hallel is not appropriate. The reason: Rosh Hashanah is Judgment Day in the Heavenly Tribunal. Although we dress in white, and anticipate a lenient ruling for the year, it is not the time to recite Hallel (until Succot). Rather, we are to sound the shofar.

Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of the Ten Days of Repentance. Its judgment is for the purpose of freeing us from that force within the human psyche which seeks to usurp the Godly Soul. “Let no alien power reside within you, and do not bow down before any external force” (verse 10), refers to the yetzer ha’ra (urge to do evil), the inner Pharaoh that dwells within man. It is only “Hashem your God who lifts you up out of the land of Mitzrayim” (verse 11). But first you must “Open your mouth wide,” i.e., express your deepest longing and pray to be redeemed from this powerful force. Then “I will fulfill it.”

The cycle of sin begins when a person becomes enslaved to his desires. As we shall discuss, when speaking of sin, the Torah uses three key words: chet, avon, and pesha (see Exodus 34:7). The cycle begins with chet, unintentional sin or error, which, if left unchecked, tends to pull us downward with a momentum of its own.

Rosh Hashanah comes to free us from this cycle. At any point a person can RETURN and be released. This is the connection between Rosh Hashanah and Yetziat Mitzrayim [the Exodus from Egypt]. This is the purpose of the Ten Days of Repentance beginning with Rosh Hashanah. And this is the purpose of the shofar.

The Talmud states a law: “One who blows shofar into a pit has not fulfilled his obligation.”7 Rabbi Yaacov ben Asher explains that the commandment of the Torah is not fulfilled by blasting the shofar but by hearing its call. For this reason, one who blows shofar into a pit has not fulfilled his obligation, for he cannot be sure whether he is hearing its call or its echo. For this very reason the blessing on the shofar is not litkoa ba’shofar, “to blast the shofar,” but rather, lishmoa kol shofar, “to hear the call of the shofar.” One must clearly hear the call of the shofar, not its echo.8

But lishmoa kol shofar means much more than just physically hearing the shofar. Shma—hearing always implies that we must “understand” and “receive” something, in this case the message that the shofar wishes to teach us. This message must not be deflected in any way. This is the reason why we must hear the call of the shofar directly, and not as an echo. Only thus can it penetrate to the quick.9

And what is the message? Rambam alluded to it when he wrote: “Despite the fact that the blasting of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is a divine decree [for which no reason is given, its penetrating sound] contains a message: Awake, you sleepers, awake from your sleep! O you slumberers, awaken from your slumber! Examine your deeds! Return in teshuvah! Remember your Creator!”10

The primal scream of the shofar calls directly to our souls to awaken from the slumber of this world. Listen, listen, and let the sound resonate deeply. The secret of the shofar is to hear the sound that is always there, the sound-frequency that underlies all reality, but which is drowned

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7 Rosh Hashanah 27b.
8 Tur, Orach Chayim 585.
9 Rabbi Yaacov Yoseph of Polnoy, Tzafnat Paanei'ach, Va'era.
10 Hilkhot Teshuvah 3:4.
out by the static that seeks to prevent us from hearing. The secret of the shofar is to hear Hashem calling to our souls in that sound, reminding us who we are.

Again, all this is connected to the Exodus. When we return in teshuvah and hear the call of the shofar, we begin to leave our personal and collective Mitzrayim. Through teshuvah we reclaim our identity and rectify and redeem the damage that resulted from our unintentional as well as our intentional sins. This is the lesson of this psalm. The ability to return in teshuvah comes from the level of the yovel [a type of shofar that is blown at the beginning of the Yovel-Jubilee year, the level of the Fifty Gates of Binah-Understanding]. From there, the powerful light of Yetziat Mitzrayim [the Exodus from Egypt which is mentioned fifty times in the Torah] shines down on us to ennoble us, to lift us up above our suffering, and transform us.

Transforming Judgment to Mercy
On Rosh Hashanah morning, we read Psalm 47 seven times before we blow the shofar. Like all psalms, this psalm is very deep. It speaks about a transformation from judgment to mercy—but not in a simplistic way. The transformation takes place in such a way that we realize that what we thought was judgment is really mercy:

1. LaMenatze'ach—dedicated to the One who grants victory [on the day of judgment]. By the descendants of Korach. Mizmor—a cutting-psalm. 2. All [the angel-ministers of] the nations are clapping their hands [accusing us and rejoicing in their success at having deceived us]. We must therefore blast [the shofar] and pray to Elokim [in order to confuse the accuser and let him know that his days are numbered]. 3. [He must realize now] that Hashem [YKVK] alone is supreme and awesome. He alone reigns sovereign over the entire world. 4. [It is for this reason that in the future] He will subdue nations before us and place governments under our rule. 5. He will restore our inheritance which He has chosen for us [the Torah and Eretz Yisrael], the pride of Yaacov [our prayers and the Beit HaMikdash] which He loves, selah.

6. Elokim will then rise up [from His throne of judgment] with the blast. Hashem [will descend upon His throne of mercy] at the sound of the shofar! 7. [For by crying out from the depths of our hearts and sounding the shofar] we cut through to [the mercy of] Elokim with piercing song. We cut through to our King with piercing song! 8. For [when the judgments are sweetened by our teshuvah] Elokim alone reigns sovereign over the entire world [with mercy]. We must therefore wisely cut away [the forces of darkness, not wasting a precious moment before we return wholeheartedly to our God]. 9. Elokim reigns sovereign over the nations! Elokim has seated Himself upon His throne of holiness [the perfect combination of judgment and mercy]. 10. The [angelic] ministers of the nations are assembling [in heaven] to join the people of the God of Avraham [as they accept Hashem as the sole ruler of the world]. For Elokim shields the world [from the powers of evil]. He is greatly exalted.

The Midrash on verse 6 hints at how we can change judgment to mercy: 11

יהודה בר נחמני בר נחמני בשם תרקי ושק"א "יהודה בר נחמני בר נחמני הסיר את חורים ומקלד להם." משעה שני ה"שה יなんと שורף. "אלו בנים נורא בתו, כי ה"שה י acompי טובים יתו والسנה נוחם יתור."

Yehudah bar Nachmani, in the name of Resh Lakish, opened [his discourse]: It is written, "Elokim rose up with the blast; Hashem [YKVK] with the sound of the shofar" (Psalm 47:6). When the Holy One blessed-be-He gets up to sit on His throne of judgment,
He does so with [the divine name Elokim, which represents His attribute of] judgment, as it is written, "Elokim rose up with the blast."

When the people of Israel take the shofar in hand to blow it (indicating their sincere desire to return to Him), however, the Holy One blessed-be-He rises up from His throne of judgment and sits upon His throne of mercy. [He then judges with the divine name YHVH, which represents His attribute of mercy,] as it is written, "Hashem with the sound of the shofar."

The Midrash now adds a very important clarification:

He then becomes filled with mercy for them [His children]. [Out of love for them] He transforms the attribute of judgment into the attribute of mercy! When does He do this? "In the seventh month, on the first day (Rosh Hashanah)" (Leviticus 23:24).

"He transforms the attribute of judgment into the attribute of mercy." This final addendum to the text of the Midrash tells us a number of things. Obviously, God does not stand up or sit down in any anthropomorphic sense. Sitting on a throne means that He makes Himself accessible, reveals Himself, and relates to His world in a certain way. When He sits on His throne of judgment, He judges us according to our actions. When He sits on His throne of mercy and compassion, He takes into account our desire to rectify what we have done wrong. When He sits on His throne of unconditional love, He shows us that He loves us irrespective of what we have done or deserve.

The main thing the Midrash is coming to teach us is that judgment is no less compassionate than pure unconditional love. Hashem’s judgment is for our benefit. His judgment flows from His awesome compassion for us.

This is alluded to in a verse in the Book of Proverbs:

O how good/sweet is revealed rebuke/correction [when we realize that it flows] from the deepest hidden love (Proverbs 27:5).

Justice does not contradict love and mercy. When we pray that Hashem’s mercy overcome and dominate over His attributes, i.e., His judgment and justice, we are just asking to be able to see His mercy behind the justice. We are asking to see that the entire system of justice that God has established in order to run His world flows from the deepest love.

Hashem’s judgment is the most amazing expression of His love for us, for it shows that He cares about what we do. He thus wants us to earn the eternal reward that He wishes to give us. We learn from this that the greatest gift that the Infinite One wishes to give us is the ability to attain our own perfection.

In classical Jewish teachings, the idea that Hashem judges us corresponds to the mode of divine providence called skhar ve’onesh (reward-and-punishment, measure-for-measure, action-reaction), signifying that our actions, speech, and even the subtest thought have consequences.
In Kabbalah, it is called Zeir Anpin (Small Face, Short-Tempered) because, compared to Arikh Anpin (Long-Face, Infinitely-Patient) and Atik Yomin (Ancient of Days, Infinitely Merciful and Loving), our initial experience of it is one of judgment (i.e., accountability and responsibility for our actions). In truth, however, Zeir Anpin is not a separate and distinct mode of providence, but rather a subset or subsystem within the higher mode of Arikh Anpin/Atik Yomin, which itself is a subset within the higher mode of Adam Kadmon, which itself is a filter of the light of Infinite Ein Sof.

When all of these subsystems are seen as parts of a great overriding mega-system of filters that allows a world to come into existence in which we (our souls) could earn our own Eternity, our whole relationship to Hashem changes. We understand that His judgment is not a contradiction to His mercy, but rather an expression of it. We realize that what we thought was His anger/displeasure with us is really His love, His care. To grasp this, though, is no small matter. First we need to understand the seriousness of Hashem’s judgment. We need to look back on our lives and recognize that all our suffering has been nothing less than Hashem visiting His judgment upon us. For whatever reason, whether it was to cleanse us, to awaken us from our slumber, or for some reason that goes beyond our personal destinies and touches upon the destiny of our people and the world, Hashem saw fit to correct us through suffering. Suffering also includes not understanding why we suffer; not understanding who we are.

The moment we realize this, literally take it to heart, we might begin to cry. For it is not merely an intellectual realization. The truth is that Hashem will be revealing it to our souls. In that split second, we will understand that all the suffering we underwent was also an expression of His awesome love. Our acceptance of this actually changes the suffering into yesurin shel ahavah [afflictions of love, i.e., afflictions that we not only accept with love but which we know come from Hashem’s love for us]. Once we truly accept this, we feel His love as never before. We see His judgment of us actually turning into compassion. Moreover we see behind His judgment of us, and know it as an expression of His deepest love and compassion.

Confusing the Satan

We mentioned the Ari’s statement that the shofar confuses the Satan and prevents him from being able to bring accusation against us in the heavenly court. Who or what is the Satan, and what does it mean that he gets confused?

First of all, the source for this idea is brought in the Tur by Rabbi Yaacov ben Asher:  

Why do we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah first while sitting and only then (during the Amidah of Mussaf) standing? There are two opinions. The first states that it is to confuse the accuser, i.e., to confuse him immediately with the first set of shofar blasts before the actual tefillah (Mussaf), to prevent him from accusing during the tefillah itself. This opinion is brought in the Jerusalem Talmud: It is written, “Death will be swallowed forever” (Isaiah 25:8), and “On that day, He will blow a great shofar” (Isaiah 27:13).

The meaning is that, when the Satan [who is also called death] hears the first set of shofar blasts [on Rosh Hashanah], he will become confused and yet not confused. He

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12 See below, “Hashem’s Names,” “Yom Kippur and Teshuvah,” “The Yod-Gimel Midot HaRachamim.”
13 Tur, Orach Chayim 585, p. 300b.
will say, “Perhaps the time has come [when I shall be swallowed forever].” He will be frightened and confused and will be unable to accuse [during the Amidah of Mussaf].

The second opinion states that we blow the shofar twice (once sitting and once standing) because the Satan is not confused until he hears the second set. This opinion is also brought in the Jerusalem Talmud.

The Beit Yoseph (Rabbi Yoseph Karo) quotes Sefer Mitzvot Gadol which quotes the Jerusalem Talmud further: 14

Even if the accuser is not frightened [by the first set], he will certainly remember [with the blasting of second set] that when the great shofar [of the redemption] finally does sound to signal the end of days, his end-time will have come to be swallowed up forever. So [now, every year] when he hears the shofar, he remembers that final hour, like a man who sees a corpse before him and remembers [the day of] his own eventual death. With this, he [the accuser] becomes confused and cannot accuse.

Our sages have informed us that the power of evil dresses up in many disguises. As they put it: 15

The inner adversary [in a man’s heart] is none other than the accuser [on high]. And the accuser [on high] is none other than the angel of death. [As the inner adversary] he comes down [into a person’s thoughts] to tempt him to sin. [As accuser] he ascends to heaven to accuse. [As angel of death] he descends to take a man’s soul.

In very simple terms, we learn from this that the sin, the accusation of guilt, and the punishment are so inextricably intertwined as to be different aspects of the same thing. We can now understand that the special efficacy of the shofar to fluster and confuse the heavenly accuser is not just some kind of magical spell or hex. Far from it. **The call of the shofar is the voice of the neshamah (soul) calling to God from within the narrow straits and constricted consciousness of this-world.**

By blowing the shofar, we are saying that we want to take our lives back into our own hands. In this way we confuse and disarm the inner adversary within us by breaking its power over us, by revolting against its supremacy in our lives, by refusing to fall for the lie any more. When we do this down here in this-world, the spiritual power of the heavenly accuser above is correspondingly weakened. For, as we have seen, the inner adversary and the heavenly accuser are merely different faces of the same power. At the same time, any judgment or punishment that was hanging over us—because we were unable to face the truth that we had in effect relinquished our autonomy until now and played completely into the hands of an illusion—is sweetened and mitigated.

If Rosh Hashanah is judgment day in the heavenly tribunal, Yom Kippur is a court of appeals. On Yom Kippur, we reenter the court after using the seven intervening days to assess how we can become better individuals. Our work is the work of tikun (fixing)—our own tikun, and the tikun of the world.

Our own tikun involves redeeming, releasing, and elevating the hidden sparks of our own personalities that have heretofore been trapped in unhealthy, dysfunctional behaviors, thoughts, attitudes. Our task is to elevate all these sparks of holiness and thereby redeem

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14 Beit Yoseph, Orach Chayim 585, top of p. 301a.
15 Baba Batra 16a.
them. In so doing we ourselves gain, and we become elevated. In addition, although the forces that surround and live parasitically off these sparks may seem to do everything they can to bring us down, the truth is that even those forces are transformed by our inner work. When we cleanse ourselves, the world automatically becomes more open to Godliness.\(^\text{16}\)

After \textit{Yom Kippur} we build a \textit{succah} and live in it for seven days. As noted above, \textit{Succot} is akin to sharing and celebrating with other souls in the royal ballroom. In another sense, \textit{Succot} can be seen as a kind of self-imposed exile. Either image we use, we understand that \textit{Succot} is a special time to remove ourselves from our normal way of living in order to internalize more and more the new illumination that entered our heads on \textit{Rosh Hashanah} and our hearts on \textit{Yom Kippur}.

On \textit{Hoshanah Rabbah} (the seventh night of \textit{Succot}) we remain awake all night and read the entire book of \textit{Devarim} (Deuteronomy), a recap of everything that happened to us in Egypt and in the desert (itself a recap and rectification of all history up to that point). In the yearly cycle we start reading \textit{Devarim} just before \textit{Tisha b’Av}, on \textit{Shabbat Chazon}.

The idea of reading \textit{Devarim} from \textit{Tisha b’Av} onwards is to give us a chance to look back over the whole year and our whole life. Then, on \textit{Hoshanah Rabbah}, we read it again, in one night. After taking two months to recap and look back, we do the same thing in one shot. We attempt to scan the total movie of our lives in one incredible glance. Why? Because when this is allowed to happen, the effect is one of total awakening. We finally get it. We no longer see our lives from our point of view, but from God’s. God is the key; our awareness of His presence transforms everything. This is similar to reports by those who have had near-death experiences. They literally relive their whole life from start to finish, including all details, in what they realize afterwards was just a few minutes. Returning from such an experience, they are forever transformed. In order to get the deep lessons that \textit{Leil Hoshanah Rabbah} holds, we refrain from uttering anything but holy words that entire night.

We make our last plea to the court on \textit{Simchat Torah}. Or rather, on \textit{Simchat Torah} we accept whatever Hashem has decreed on us. Or rather, we realize that our pleas to change and Hashem’s will are one and the same. How do we do this? By dancing with the Torah! As we are dancing, we are actually sweetening any harsh judgments that might have been decreed to correct us. The more we realize the awesome power of our dancing to sweeten all judgment, the more we can allow the dance of the Torah to lift us up to the heights of ecstasy.

\(^{16}\) This is what I meant above when I said that all the changes that we are looking for will not happen out there until they first happen inside, e.g., that the only way to change anything is by going in. \textbf{The neshamah-soul is the interface between God and the world.} It is through the medium of our \textit{neshamah}-soul that we connect with God on the way “in” and “up.” It is also through the medium of our \textit{neshamah}-soul that God’s transcendent unity enters into and permeates reality on the way “down” and “out.”

See \textit{Baal Shem Tov al HaTorah, parashat Noach, Amud HaTefillah} §15, §17. See especially note 13, quoting Rabbi Yitzchak Izik of Kamarna, “The universal principle is: When you return to the Singular Unity, you will find that the aspect of \textit{olamot}-worlds..exists in the mystery of \textit{kelim}-vessels [for His light]. He, in turn, illumines them [with the light of His Divinity], to give them life...This is the mystery of ‘the fullness of the whole world is His Glory’ (Isaiah 6:3). That is, the illumination of the light of \textit{Ein Sof} spreads forth all the way to the deepest abyss. There is, however, an \textit{intermediate} level that exists between the light of His Divinity and the \textit{kelim}-vessels of the \textit{olamot}-worlds. This is the mystery of the \textit{neshamot}-souls...that connect and allow the light of His Blessed Divinity to flow in a revealed way...” (Rabbi Yitzchak Izik of Kamarna, \textit{Heikhal HaBerakhah, parashat Naso}, p. 28b).
Chapter 2

Inner Work of the High Holidays

Rosh Hashanah Is the “Head” of the Year

The word rosh means head. On Rosh Hashanah—the head of the year—Hashem illuminates our minds with a seed of new consciousness. On Rosh Hashanah, a tiny opening is made. Eternity enters time.

As the head of the year, Rosh Hashanah is like the seed-thought of the year that precedes the tree-body of its days. Just as every limb of the body is connected to the brain via the nervous system and the spinal cord, in a similar way the days of the year can be seen as all connecting back into Rosh Hashanah and receiving their life-force from it. In this sense it contains in potential all the lessons that we will learn in the coming year. Our mission then is to live out this year in all its fullness, lest it remain a thought without a body, a vision without a quest.

This image can be extended further. Each Rosh Hashanah is itself a cell in a larger system of new-year’s days that ultimately connect back to the original new-year’s day in Gan Eden. Similarly, each individual on the planet is part of something greater—mankind. This is why Hashem judges every single individual in terms of the entire generation, and the entire generation in terms of the larger body of history that extends from Adam to Mashiach [i.e., from Creation to Redemption] and beyond. He does not judge our actions of the previous year in isolation, but rather in terms of all that preceded it and all that will follow it—from the very beginning until the very end of history. In order to determine what is necessary for the coming year, Hashem takes all of Time into account. This is what we mean when we pray, “All that is hidden is revealed before You—so many hidden secrets since the beginning of the world. All is revealed and known before You, Hashem our God, for You view and behold [from the beginning] to the end of all generations.”

So the idea of each of us connecting our own life back to our vision quest also involves all of mankind reevaluating its position now vis-à-vis its starting point and its destination. It involves all of us connecting our lives back to the original seed-thought of creation. Why do we exist and what are we living for?

Shlomo haMelekh wrote, “There is an appointed time for everything, and a point in time for every purpose under the heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). The Midrash gives examples of various events that were pre-appointed:

"There is an appointed time for everything.” There was a pre-appointed time for Adam to enter Gan Eden...and a pre-appointed time for him to depart from there...There was a pre-appointed time for Noach to enter the ark...and a pre-appointed time for him to depart from there...

"A point in time for every purpose under the heaven.” There was a pre-appointed time for the Torah to be given to Israel. Rabbi Bibi said: There was a pre-appointed time for

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17 Mussaf Rosh Hashanah.
18 Kohelet Rabbah 3:1:1.
the Torah which transcends the heavens [i.e., beyond time and space] to become manifest beneath the heavens [within time and space, within history].

The Maharal explains that the events recorded in the Midrash were too laden with consequences to have happened purely by chance. It is unthinkable that events which are essential to [and will profoundly effect] the entire history of the world could happen randomly. Rather, everything is part of a grand order, the interconnectedness of which is so breathtaking that it cannot possibly have come about through chance.\textsuperscript{19}

Ramchal takes this a step further:\textsuperscript{20}

The level of each festival depends on the quality of the divine influx and the power of the light that shone on it [when it first occurred]...On each of these special days something happened whereby at that time a great tikun (rectification) was accomplished and a great spiritual illumination shone. The Highest Wisdom decreed that, on every anniversary of these days, a complement of their original illumination should shine forth. And the results of its rectification are renewed for those who celebrate it. Thus we are commanded to observe Pesach with all its rituals to recall the Exodus. At the time of the Exodus we experienced an extremely powerful rectification. That is why, on the anniversary of this event every year, a light shines forth that parallels the one that illuminated us then.

The significance of sounding the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is related to the fact that on this day the Holy One judges the whole world. On Rosh Hashanah He renews all creation as part of a new cycle, namely, a new year. Courts of justice are set up on high, and all created beings are judged...At this time the accuser is poised to accuse mankind for its sins. Hashem therefore commanded us to sound the shofar in order to invoke the hanhagah (mode of providence) of mercy, rather than one of harsh judgment...

Further on he adds:\textsuperscript{21}

The true significance of the shofar is... to arouse the merit of the ancient forefathers...to disempower the accuser, and finally [through our sincere teshuvah] to pray that Hashem disregard our wrongdoing...All this is accomplished through the shofar when it is properly accompanied by the teshuvah of all Israel.

The significance of Yom Kippur is that Hashem set aside one day for Israel when its teshuvah is readily accepted and wrongdoings can easily be erased. This rectifies all the spiritual damage caused by these transgressions, and removes the darkness [power of evil] that became empowered as a result of them. Individuals who repent on this day can therefore return to the levels of holiness and closeness to Hashem from which they were cast as a result of their wrongdoings, for it is on this day that a light shines forth that can complete this entire concept. In order to receive this LIGHT, Israel must keep all the commandments associated with this day. This is particularly true of the fast since this causes each individual to be greatly divorced from the physical, and elevated to some degree toward the aspect of the angels.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessor adds that it is for this very reason that the major holidays are not only commemorations of past events. We do not merely stand still and let time pass over

\textsuperscript{19} Tiferet Yisrael 25.
\textsuperscript{20} Derekh Hashem 4:7:6.
\textsuperscript{21} Derekh Hashem 4:8:4-5.
us, never to return again. Rather, time is spiral, and we travel through it. As we travel, we return to [or, more precisely, realign ourselves with] the very same illumination that shone long ago. **Thus, each year, at Pesach, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, or Chanukah, we arrive at the exact point in time that corresponds to the original festival and receives that same illumination. The same is true of all the festivals.**

Time can also be likened to a seed that contains the entire program of its own future development. Within the seed all details are contained in a unified whole. As the seed develops, all its latent powers and potentials unfold. In the same way the total illumination that shone in all its magnificence on the first Rosh Hashanah when Adam was created is subsequently broken up and released over a long period of time [similar to a capsule whose active ingredients are set to go off at timed intervals]. In this way every subsequent Rosh Hashanah embodies a completely new revelation of the light of creation, just as every Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Succot, Purim, and Chanukah represent completely new revelations of the light of redemption—lights that never shone before in this particular way.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov says that the Shabbat before the first Pesach (and before every subsequent Pesach) is called Shabbat haGadol because it was/is a taste of the Great Sabbath that will manifest with the advent of the seventh millennium.

On a deeper level it is understood that that Great Future Sabbath already exists and has always existed. Indeed, it is the context within which the 6,000 years of history unfold. Nevertheless, since we live IN time, we have to go THROUGH history to get to it.

Rabbi Nachman extends this to include every great revelation and miracle that ever occurred. This includes the first Pesach itself, the first Shavuot, the first Rosh Hashanah, the first Yom Kippur, the first Succot, the first Chanukah, the first Purim, and all the other auspicious days throughout history on which powerful miracles have occurred which have left an indelible imprint on the psychic history of the world. The source for all these days—the powerhouse from which all of them were generated—the fountain from which they all flowed—is the Great Sabbath of the future which is called the seventh millennium and the World to Come. All the holidays were and are tastes of that great time.

In an amazing way, however, the light of the Great Shabbat, that Hashem will reveal in all its glory at the end of history, is none other than the Or haGanuz, the great light that He hid and stored away before He created the world (actually, that He hid away in order to create the world). This is the meaning of Hashem’s statement through Isaiah, "I declare the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10). The light was, is, and will always be the same. It is we who will be different. Enfolded in the original light, our souls existed in a state of undifferentiated unity. But Hashem wanted to give each one of us life, eternal life, and to reveal His infinite oneness through the prisms of our lives. His will, the divine will, is to **reveal** His infinite light within the finite fabric of creation. This is why He hid the original light and stored it away for the future. This is the meaning of what we say on Shabbat evening in Lekha Dodi: "Let us go forth to welcome the Shabbat, for it is the source of blessing [for the entire week]. It was ordained from the very beginning and before time began. Although last in action, it [Shabbat] was first in the thought [of God]."

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Yom Kippur
If Rosh Hashanah is the head, Yom Kippur is the heart. Rosh Hashanah is the highest consciousness of the Godly light breaking through and illuminating our mind. Yom Kippur is internalizing this in the heart, the holy of holies of our being, which parallels the Holy of Holies in the Temple into which the Cohen Gadol entered on Yom Kippur.

On Yom Kippur we enter the inner sanctum of our being. In this sacred place we reconnect to our essence, our soul, our mission. Here, in the holy of holies, we can examine our lives objectively. We can free ourselves not only from negative actions that we have done but also from the negative self-image that we have developed as a result of our actions. Here, by saying Viduy (usually translated confession) over and over again, we are asking Hashem to clear us from any charges that are being held against us in heaven. Contrary to popular belief, Viduy is not a guilt-trip, a finger-pointing, breast-beating accusation against us. Lehitvadot, the reflexive form of the verb lehodot, means to admit to ourselves, to come clean, to dissociate from and let go of anything and everything that is holding us back from being fully who we are. Viduy is a release from compulsions, and from the excuses and rationalizations that we make in order to dodge responsibility for our actions. Viduy is self-cleansing. It is a reclaiming of our energy (the same energy that we used until now to undermine ourselves) for growth.

The Viduy on Yom Kippur is said in the order of the aleph-beth, first forwards, then backwards. The idea behind detailing our sins using the aleph-beth is this: We are trying to touch every possible base, to leave no stone unturned. Following the aleph-beth is a memory aid. It is meant to assist us in recalling what we might otherwise tend to forget. But sometimes the opposite happens. We recite what is written in the Machzor but fail to connect the words to our inner experience. Without understanding why these things were incorporated into the prayers, we are at a tremendous disadvantage. We need proper instructions in how to use the Machzor in order to get optimum results.

At any rate, the aleph-beth is meant to awaken sleeping memories. It is then up to us to enter into those memories, to get into the details, to recall anything and everything that we may have done wrong, and to come clean to ourselves and to Hashem.

Below are samples of some of the expressions used in the Viduy. Particularly interesting are expressions which refer to some limb or part of the human body. As we scan these selected examples in which bodily parts are mentioned (24 out of 50), we notice that many of them are not meant to be taken literally (“with the thoughts of our heart,” “with evil tongue,” “by closing our hand,” etc.). On the contrary we know that, as a general rule, ancient Hebrew expresses abstract concepts through bodily metaphors. Nevertheless it is extremely important to also pay attention to the literal level of the words. In the Viduy, which is reiterated repeatedly at different times on Yom Kippur, we pray and ask:

May it be Your Will, Hashem our God, to have mercy on us, to pardon us for all our mistakes, to grant us atonement for all our transgressions, and to pardon and forgive us for all our crimes. For the mistakes we have committed before You:

- **be'giluy arayot**—with sexual immodesty
- **be'hirhur halev**—with the thoughts of our heart (i.e., evil schemes and machinations)
- **be'viduy peh**—with the confession of our mouth
- **be'chozek yad**—with a strong hand (i.e., forcing others against their will)
- **be'tumat sefatayim**—with unclean lips (all kinds of foul language)
be’lashon hara—with evil tongue (i.e., defamation)
be’marit ha’ayin—in the sight of the eye (i.e., creating false impressions for good or bad)
be’siach sifrotenu—with the speech of our lips
be’yineyim ramot—with haughty eyes
be’zizhen peh—with the opening of the mouth (i.e., misusing the power of speech)
be’tzaadey raglayim lehara—with feet striding to do evil
be’kefitzat yad—by closing our hand (i.e., stinginess)
be’tsumet yad—by lending a hand [to do evil] (i.e., accomplice to a crime)
be’timhon levav—out of bewilderment of heart
be’tzavar atak—with haughty neck
be’azut metzach—with brazen forehead
be’sikur eynayim—with the scanning of the eyes
be’netiat garon—by tilting the neck (i.e., acting cocky and vain)
be’lashon tarmit—with deceptive tongue
be’bituy sefatayim—with an utterance of the lips
be’akhilat issur—by eating that which is forbidden
be’tzavar atak—with haughty neck
be’azut metzach—with brazen forehead
be’sikur eynayim—with the scanning of the eyes
be’netiat garon—by tilting the neck (i.e., acting cocky and vain)
be’lashon tarmit—with deceptive tongue
be’bituy sefatayim—with an utterance of the lips
be’akhilat issur—by eating that which is forbidden
be’ramach evarim ve’shisa gidim shel gufenu, nafshenu, ruchenu ve’nishmatenu—with the 248 limbs and organs, and the 365 sinews and nerves of our bodies, souls, spirits, divine souls.

Why such attention to body parts (even if only symbolic)? Rabbi Nachman of Breslov provides a valuable hint. In his magnum opus, Likutey Moharan, he taught:

Likutey Moharan

When a person knows that everything that happens to him is for his benefit, this [perception and understanding] is a foretaste of the level of Olam Haba (the World to Come). As [David haMelekh] said, “I bless Elokim [God’s attribute of justice] for everything [even the suffering I endure] just as I bless YHVH [God’s attribute of mercy] for everything [i.e., all the kindnesses He bestows]” (Psalm 56:11). This hints to the level of heightened awareness associated with Olam Haba, as our sages taught:

"Vehayah Hashem leMelekh al kol haaretz—Hashem will be [recognized] as King over the entire world. Bayom hahu yihiyeh Hashem echad ushemo echad—on that day, Hashem will be one and His name will be one" (Zekhariah 14:9). [How can it be written that Hashem will be one?] Isn’t He one now? Rabbi Acha bar Chaninah explained: This world is not like the World to Come. In this world when hearing good tidings, we say, “Blessed is He who is good and who does good.” When receiving bad news, we say, “Blessed is the Judge whose judgment is truth.” [In the World to Come, this will no longer be the case. Rather, we will see the good clearly in all that happens.] In the World to Come, we will only say, “Blessed is He who is good and who does good.”

Likutey Moharan I 4:1-5.
Pesachim 50a.
The divine name YKVK and the divine name Elokim will be totally one. [It will become clear that everything that happened in olam hazeh (this world) was for the ultimate good. Therefore the verse can be restated as “On that day the oneness of Hashem and the oneness of His name will be revealed.”]

2. Now, it is impossible to attain this heightened awareness except by elevating the Malkhut d’Kedushah [Kingdom of Holiness, Shekhinah] from its exile among the nations. For presently sovereignty and rulership are in the hands of the nations. This is the reason why their avodat elilim [the simple translation of which is “idolatry” but whose root is el which means naught or nothing] are called elohim acherim (other gods). For they suck [their power] from the aspect of Malkhut, which is called Elokim, as it is written, “Elokim Malki mikedem—Elokim is my King from long ago” (Psalm 74:12) [which hints that Hashem’s Malkhut used to be more real for us, but that was long ago; now the Malkhut is in exile].

But when a person elevates the Malkhut-Shekhinah from among the nations, another verse is fulfilled, “Ki Melekh kol haaretz Elokim—Elokim is King of the whole world” (Psalm 47:8) [which hints to the return of the Malkhut to its rightful place].

3. Yet it is impossible to “return the Malkhut-Kingdom” to the Holy One except by means of viduy devarim (expressing and articulating our wrongdoings in words). [This is based on the connection between Malkhut and speech. When our speech is defective, Malkhut, the divine word, is in exile, and its energies are taken and misappropriated by the forces of impurity/evil. When speech is rectified, on the other hand, Malkhut is elevated out of exile.] Ideally this [viduy devarim] should be done in the presence of a talmid chakham [a wise sage who can understand how to lift us up out of the initial depression that comes as a side-effect of admitting we have done wrong]. Through this [i.e., through rectifying our own Malkhut, which is embodied in our speech] we effect a rectification in the divine Malkhut [extricating her/it from forced exile among the forces of evil] and elevate it up to its Source.

This is the meaning of the verse, “Kechu imakhem devarim veshuvu el Hashem—take with you devarim (words) and return to Hashem” (Hoshea 14:3). “Take with you words” refers to viduy devarim—for devarim is a code-word for Malkhut, for the word davar also means leader, as in “davar echad l’dor—there is one leader of a generation.” And return to Hashem refers to the rectification and elevation of Malkhut—which is also called Elokim—up to the level of Hashem [YKVK], as mentioned above in connection with the verse, “I bless Elokim [God’s attribute of justice] for everything [even the suffering I endure] just as I bless YKVK [God’s attribute of mercy] for everything [i.e., all the kindnesses He bestows]” (Psalm 56:11). That is, we will know that everything that happens to us is all for the good, and we will be able to recite the blessing, “Blessed is He who is good and who does good” over everything.

26 Sanhedrin 8a.
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4. Knowing all this is called yediah shelemah (complete or perfect awareness). For the essence of daat (awareness, consciousness) is the complete union of chasadim and gevurot (Hashem’s love and His justice). This is called daat because these two seemingly opposite poles are one in daat. In other words, one who has overcome the dichotomy between Hashem’s love and His justice is said to have attained daat. Such a person is then able to bless “He who is good and who does good” over everything that happens to him. This is the meaning of “Hashem is one and His name is one,” which, as we saw above, means that in the future the unity will be totally revealed, and we will see that all was for the good.

5. Now, a person’s transgressions are on/in his bones, as it is written, “And their transgressions will be etched upon/into their bones” (Ezekiel 32:27) [which, in our context can also be understood as the memory of all our deeds being stored in our musculature]. The meaning behind this is that each transgression has its own negative letter-combination. When we commit a particular sin, a negative letter-combination is etched upon our bones. This brings the spoken aspect of the prohibition which we have transgressed into the realm of impurity. Spiritually, this is equivalent to bringing the divine Malkhut into exile among the nations, giving them power to rule...

By means of viduy devarim, however, the negative letter-combination of the letters disappears from the bones into which they have been etched. By virtue of the words of the Viduy they are transformed into positive combinations. [The reason that viduy devarim has this power is because] speech actually emanates from the bones, as alluded to in the verse, “All my bones shall say: Hashem, who is [loving and merciful] like You!” (Psalm 35:10). [By coming clean in Viduy] we thus tear down the negative structure and letter-combination, and build the positive structure of the Malkhut d’Kedushah.
Body Awareness

Above we noted that a large part of the Viduy is devoted to enumerating transgressions that we may have committed with specific limbs of our bodies. Rabbi Nachman has now informed us of the deeper spiritual reasons behind this, both in terms of redeeming the divine Malkhut from exile, and reclaiming our own personal malkhut-energy for positive growth.

In order to get the most out of this, let us now expand this idea to include not only whatever wrongs we may have committed, but whatever wounds we are carrying as a result of wrongs that may have been committed against us. Let us say that all kinds of long-forgotten memories are stored in our bodies—in our musculature, in our bones, and all the way down to the cellular level. A lot of the work of Yom Kippur involves arousing these long-forgotten memories through the power of the spoken word.

Add to this that each Amidah (Standing Prayer) is extremely long. That is, we end up having to stand in a fixed position for long periods of time over and over throughout the entire day. In our opinion this is intentional. It is actually part of the prayer that we become aware of and acutely feel the tension and tightness in our neck, shoulders, chest, arms, lower back, stomach, loins, thighs, calves, and feet. It is natural and normal to feel slightly stiff, to notice that our feet hurt a little. The question is what to do about it.

Get into your body. Feel your feet. Feel your neck and shoulders. Tense and relax your face muscles. Register the possibility that any discomfort you may be feeling is connected somehow to the fact that you are standing in prayer before the One who created you. Include this now in your prayer experience. That is, as you use the words of the Viduy to enumerate the different parts of your own body, focus your consciousness on them and in them.

Allow yourself to be fully present in your body. Take a deep breath. Stretch a little. If you feel any stiffness and discomfort, it is a sure sign the Viduy is taking effect on an energetic level. With your words, you are causing your body to vibrate at a higher energy frequency. This is the gift of Yom Kippur. With it, you may begin to recall things that you did with your hands, feet, mouth, eyes, etc. (or things that were done to you that wounded you and caused an energy blockage).

Now is the time to really come clean, not just with words, but in your bones, your muscles, and your cells. Ask to be released from all negative behaviors, attitudes, and thought-patterns that have held you back until now. This includes negative feelings about yourself, about your parents, and ultimately about God. If this was part of what you had to go through in this lifetime in order to come to your complete tikun-rectification, so be it.

This will be very difficult for some. They would rather just say the words and get on with the business of praying. After all, why introduce all this energy stuff into the holiest prayers of the year? But that is just the point. We are introducing this level of understanding here in order to take full and complete advantage of what Yom Kippur is all about.

On Yom Kippur the Cohen Gadol entered the holy of holies. Was that just then, when the Temple stood? Is this just an exercise in reminiscing about what we once had? Isn’t it obvious that Yom Kippur is meant to help you and me enter into the core of our being? Isn’t that where we meet Hashem and experience the power of His love transforming our existential pain into hardwon spiritual growth and psychological maturity? Isn’t that where we realize that everything we have ever experienced was somehow for the good?
Remember what Rabbi Nachman said: "One who has overcome the dichotomy between Hashem’s love and His justice is said to have attained daat. Such a person is then able to bless ‘He Who is good and Who does good’ over everything that happens to him. This is the meaning of ‘Hashem is one and His name is one,’ which means that, in the future the unity will be totally revealed, and we will see that all was for the good.”

In order to take full advantage of this, it must seep into every pore of our body. This is why, in my humble opinion, the sages composed the Viduy with such a heavy emphasis on the body.

Succot and Simchat Torah
On Rosh Hashanah we receive a new light from above, a new level of consciousness. On Yom Kippur we fully internalize this new light in our hearts. On Succot we come forth from the intensely introspective mode of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to the world of relationships with others. The succah is a protected environment in which we test the waters, so to speak, of being a new person, in the company of our families, friends, teachers, our people, mankind, the world. Succot involves the relational midot, the character and personality traits with which we relate to those around us:

- **Chesed**—love, giving of ourselves, caring for others, doing acts of kindness without thought of reward.
- **Gevurah**—integrity, restraint, strength of character, discipline, ability to stand up for what we believe, consistency, loyalty.
- **Tiferet**—truth, harmony, balance of the above two qualities.
- **Netzach**—strength of will, endurance, consistency, loyalty.
- **Hod**—honesty, admitting the truth, acquiescence to higher power.
- **Yesod**—connection, relationship, being a channel and conduit of light to others.

The succah is the best place to perform the naanuim (shaking) of the lulav (palm), hadasim (myrtle), aravot (willow), and etrog (citron). Here the succah represents the makif (surrounding light) of Hashem’s presence in our lives, the clouds of God’s glory that encompass us and elevate us as we leave our Egypts.

Relative to the lulav, the succah is the mochin (higher consciousness of God) that surrounds us and is waiting to be internalized via the naanuim. In this sense the lulav now corresponds to the spinal cord, and the etrog to the heart. The point is always to internalize and embody what we know in our head, and bring it into our heart. Then we can extend a sense of realness into relationships with our loved ones and others. This is why the mekubalim do the naanuim in the succah. Most importantly, they do not shake the lulav outwardly, but rather extend it in their hands, hold it there, and then bring it back to the heart center. The emphasis is on internalizing the higher consciousness of the makif in the heart, in the spirit of the verse, “Know today [in your head] and reflect upon it in your heart, that Hashem, the Eternal who transcends all, is the Supreme Being in the heavens above and on the above below—there is no other” (Deuteronomy 4:39).

This motion of extending and then returning is done three times in each of the six directions (representing the six midot), one direction at a time. [The mekubalim actually turn to each direction as they do the naanuim, as opposed to standing in one spot and pointing or waving the lulav in each direction.] The six directions correspond to the six midot thus:
We begin by facing south. South corresponds to Chesed, the right hand. Chesed not only parallels the right arm/hand symbolically but also literally. We know this because we always orient ourselves by facing east, towards Yerushalayim. When we do this, our right arm/hand is always to the south. Facing south, we meditate and thank Hashem for all the love that He has shown us.

Next, we turn 180° to the right (we always revolve to the right), to face north. North corresponds to Gevurah, the left arm/hand. Facing north, we meditate and thank Hashem even for the difficult times we have had to endure.

Next, we turn 90° to the right, to face east, the orient. East corresponds to Tiferet, the face and the front of the body. Facing east, we meditate and thank Hashem for our future—that we are always moving forward toward Yerushalayim, the Beit HaMikdash, and Geulah (Redemption), i.e., toward an incredibly bright future in this world and throughout eternity.

Next, we point the lulav up. Up corresponds to Netzach (usually associated with the right leg / kidney / testicle / ovary). Elevating the lulav straight up, we meditate and thank Hashem for the times He has lifted us up (similar to Chesed).

Next, still keeping the upper tip of the lulav facing upwards, we lower our hands downward. Down corresponds to Hod (usually associated with the left leg / kidney / testicle / ovary). Lowering the lulav (but keeping it pointed upward) we meditate and thank Hashem even for the times when we have been down (similar to Gevurah).

Finally, we turn 180° degrees (by revolving to the right), to the west. West corresponds to Yesod. Facing west, we meditate and thank Hashem for the past, even for the mistakes we have made, for they have brought us to recognize His presence in our lives in an even deeper way than otherwise.

On Simchat Torah we bring that flow of energy (that entered our mind/head, internalized in our heart, and then embodied in the relational midot) to the feet, which parallel Malkhut (the kingdom of the individual self that each one of us has been given to govern and develop to our full potential). In this way, by dancing with the Torah on Simchat Torah, the light that began to enter and permeate us on Rosh Hashanah moves all the way down into every part of our body.

Music to Probe the Soul
Let’s look back for a moment to the Viduy of Yom Kippur. In truth it is only the first half of our teshuvah. The teshuvah of Yom Kippur could be called teshuvah from awe. It represents the important first step of turning away from doing wrong. The teshuvah of Simchat Torah is teshuvah from love and joy. It is the all-important second stage of doing good with the exact same bodily parts with which we did wrong. This is the true consummation of the teshuvah process.

Rabbi Chayim Vital reminds us how this teshuvah process worked when the Beit HaMikdash stood:

When an Israelite male would bring a sin offering [to the Mishkan or Mikdash] to atone for something he had done wrong, the officiating Cohen would, by looking at his face, recognize the place [i.e., the spiritual limb] that this person had blemished, as well as

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27 We are not limited to doing this meditation on the six midot only with the lulav and only in a sukkah! It can be done anytime, anywhere.

28 Likutey Torah, Vayak'heil, on Exodus 38:8.
his thoughts when he had done the sin. Knowing this, he would then work to clean this person of his sin.

[What about a woman?] The problem is that it is forbidden, for reasons of modesty, for the Cohen to stare too deeply into the face of a woman. What did he do to overcome this prohibition? Rather, he would take her to the washstand that had been made with the copper/brass mirrors of the righteous women of Moshe’s generation. There, he would stare deeply into her reflection and discern her thoughts. [It was necessary to know her thoughts] in order to cleanse her of the impurity of her sin.

By relentlessly questioning and probing his motivations, the Cohen would help a person bringing a sin-offering get to the psychological root-cause, not only of the specific action for which he had come to the Temple to gain atonement, but for the more basic loss of wholeness in his personality. To assist in this, the Cohen would also enlist the services of the Leviim who were expert musicians. Because they possessed the deepest secrets of sound vibrations, the music of the Leviim had the power to cause extreme swings in emotion. Just as it could bring a person to the deepest level of crying, it could also bring one to the heights of ecstatic joy.

Thus, as the officiating Cohen probed ever more deeply into the psyche of the person bringing the atonement offering, the music of the Leviim would grow more and more somber. In fact, it was so powerfully somber that not only the person wishing to obtain atonement would begin to cry from the depths of his being. The Cohanim and Leviim would cry with him.

When, however, the officiating Cohen, as well as the other Cohanim on duty, would sense that the person had come to the brink of total breakdown (total soul remorse and regret over the kind of life he had lived), they signaled to the Leviim to change the music. Slowly, as if from a distance, a different kind of vibration began to fill the air. Slowly, ever so slowly, they would all emerge from the depths of remorse and begin to re-affirm life itself. Eventually, they would all dance together with awesome joy, filled with inexpressible thanks to the Creator of all souls.

For the secret of complete teshuvah (return, repentance) involves not only regretting what we have done, but becoming completely transformed in the process. This is the sod (mystery) of Yom Kippur being followed by Succot and Simchat Torah. On Yom Kippur, we stand in Viduy (Confession) and enumerate all the sins we committed with every limb of our body. Why do we enumerate the parts of the body? Because, again, consciously, we may have forgotten what we saw with our eyes, what we did with our hands, what we said with our mouths, etc. But the memory of what we did is impressed in our very tissues. By saying ‘I have done such and such with my eyes, such and such with my mouth, such and such with my hands, etc.’ we literally bring alive the memory of those repressed deeds in those limbs, to the point that our entire body begins to vibrate at a different energy level. At this

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29 Exodus 38:8 (the verse upon which Rabbi Chayim Vital bases his remarks) reads, “He [Betzalel] made the copper washstand and its copper base be’marot ha’tzovot asher tzavu (out of the mirrors of the dedicated women who congregated) at the entrance of the Communion Tent.” Rashi brings the most beautiful Midrash (Tanchuma Pekudey 9) on this verse and explains that these marot-mirrors were so special because they were donated to the Mishkan by the righteous women who had used them to beautify themselves for their husbands when they were still back in Egypt. For this very reason, Moshe initially did not want to accept them, but Hashem told him how precious they were in His eyes: “Accept them, for they are dearer to Me than all the other contributions; for through them the women bore all the tzevaot-hosts of Israel in Egypt! For when their husbands were tired from the backbreaking labor, they used to bring them food and drink, and induce them to eat. They would then take the mirrors and gaze into them together with their husbands, saying, ‘See, I am more beautiful than you,’ thus arousing their husbands’ affections...”
higher level, we can then be freed of the spiritual blemish that has been imprinted on those limbs, and return to a higher, more rectified state (than if we had never done wrong).

Still, Yom Kippur is only the negative side of teshuvah. We are to dance with those same limbs on Simchat Torah in order to complete the process. This is why the Cohanim would rejoice with the person bringing the sacrifice, saying, "Do you understand now why we had to be so tough on you! At first, complete teshuvah before our Creator must be an awesome and terrifying experience that brings us to the brink of total despair! But this is only so that our joy will be that much greater when we finally have been cleansed and transformed through His awesome mercies!"

**Hakafot**

As we now know, dancing on Simchat Torah is the culmination of our teshuvah. What’s even more special is that we dance with the Sefer Torah. In a sense, dancing with the Torah—hugging and kissing the Sefer Torah—is higher and deeper than learning the Torah. It is a total acceptance of what’s written in the Torah, above and beyond what we can understand with our limited minds.

In addition, according to the Ari, it is extremely important to encircle the bimah upon which a Sefer Torah is placed. As we make each hakafah (circuit) around the Torah, we recite the amazing psalm, "Mizmor leDavid, havu lashem bnei elim" (Psalm 29). All together we do seven hakafot on Simchat Torah night, seven more in the morning following Shachrit and Mussaf; seven more after Minchah, and finally, seven hakafot sheniyyot after Arvit/Maariv of motzaei hachag, for a grand total of 28 hakafot. In addition to these prescribed hakafot, there is a tremendous amount of extra dancing and rejoicing. These moments can be some of the highest of our lives.

Over 30 years ago, my wife, Esther, and I spent Simchat Torah in the Ezrat Torah neighborhood of Yerushalayim. The memory stands out in my mind because, in between hakafot, I was catching little slices of an amazing two-volume book, Shomer Emunim, by one of the Chasidic Masters of the last generation, Rav Arella Roth z"l. I soon happened to come across some hair-raising excerpts about what the soul experiences when it leaves the body. In the beginning of Maamar Skhar VeOnesh (Discourse on Reward and Punishment), Rav Arella writes:

> It is known, from Rabbenu Chayim Vital (in the name of his master, the Ari)...how important it is for each person to envision his own death, burial, and physical decomposition, in order to cultivate a true inner sense of yirah (awe, fear, trepidation). In order to maximize this yirah, it is helpful to learn about the frightening judgments that exist in the spiritual dimension [i.e., the psychological anguish of the soul in seeing its earthly habitation in a state of decay]. In this way, one can truly know ki eet din ve’eet dayan (that there is judgment, and there is a Judge), and that the world is not hefker (ownerless, lawless, free for the picking). The disciples of the Baal Shem Tov also warned regarding this in their holy works, namely, that contemplating such matters is a tremendous aid in subduing the physical lusts [i.e., for those who work to detach themselves from the physical while they are alive, detachment from the body at death and experiencing its subsequent decomposition is not nearly as difficult and disorienting].

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30 Shomer Emunim, Maamar Skhar VeOnesh, Chapter 1, Volume II, pp. 298-299.
The author goes on to quote passages from the Zohar which tell of the fate of the soul from the moment of death onwards. He also goes into great detail about *gilgul* (transmigration of souls). At one point he reveals that, when a human soul (or a spark thereof) retrogrades back into an animal body (due to particularly serious offenses that a person may have committed), it is not like reincarnating into a human body. When we reincarnate as humans, we forget everything about who we were in previous *gilgulim*. This is not so when a human soul incarnates into an animal. The pain is all the greater because the soul knows and remembers who it is.\(^{31}\) In a previous section in Volume I entitled *Maamar Hashgachah Pratit* (Divine Providence), Rav Arella goes into even greater detail about *gilgul*.

The point of all this, he says, is to awaken the reader to the precious opportunity that this life affords to attain true spirituality. He writes, "My dear brothers, let us return to our Creator while there is still time."\(^{32}\) When we begin to get an inkling of the fact that our souls have been sent down here to rectify past mistakes and thereby play our part in the collective *tikun* of mankind, there is no time to waste. And there is certainly no time to complain about all the difficulties we have to endure. Rav Arella emphasizes the importance of knowing that Hashem is in charge and that nothing happens by chance. In other words, if we have had to go through some heavy stuff in this lifetime, there must be a reason. We're getting cleansed!

Reading about all this between *hakafot* and dancing with the Torah, I had a flash at one point of those old western movies in which the bad guys would shoot real bullets at the good guy's feet while shouting at him, "Dance!" On that particular *Simchat Torah*, reading about all that my own soul had gone through in this and previous lifetimes, I understood that I was being given a chance to literally dance for life as opposed to limping through it and complaining every step of the way.

Let's remember that dancing on *Simchat Torah* is the grand finale of all the *teshuvah* we do on *Yom Kippur*. For me, reading Rav Arella was like taking a special extra-strength energy-pill. Every time I returned to the dancing, I got more into it and literally danced up a storm. When I began to jump high with all my strength and touched the ceiling over and over again, no one there knew that it was because I had been reading Rav Arella's descriptions of the soul world. I was dancing for my life.

*We thus see that this incredible period from *Rosh Hashanah* to *Simchat Torah* represents a process of internalizing a completely new level of existence, from head to toe. Having gone through this whole period, we can now walk into the year and take this higher awareness with us. That's what it's really all about.*

*Rosh Hashanah* is the highest consciousness of Hashem's *Malkhut*, kingship, sovereignty, reality, breaking through and illuminating our minds. *Yom Kippur* is internalizing this in our heart, the holy of holies of our being (paralleling the Holy of Holies in the Temple into which the *Cohen Gadol* entered on *Yom Kippur*). The seven days of *Succot* parallel the process of drawing down, internalizing and embodying this light in all our character traits, and also directing and focusing this same light into all our relationships. *Simchat Torah* is taking this light all the down into our feet, i.e., into every single aspect of our lives, even the lowest, most stubborn, and most bothersome.
In sum these 22 days (or 23 if we live outside Israel) are a time to internalize a whole new light in our lives from head to foot. This light is an awesome gift of the Creator who made us all and who therefore knows each and every one of us on the deepest inside level of our souls. He knows each of us individually, and He knows all of us collectively. Because this light has the power to wash us and transform us, it automatically brings us closer and closer to who we really are. It brings us inevitably closer to the highest fulfillment of our destiny. Hashem gives us this transforming light so that we can align ourselves with Him. Let’s not fight the light. Rather, let’s become empowered by it and rejoice in it.
Chapter 3

Psalm 130

For ten days, from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur, we add Psalm 130 to our morning prayers (immediately prior to Kaddish and Barekh).

1 A Song of Ascents: From the depths [of my night exile] I have called You [to reveal Yourself], Hashem [YKVK].

2 Adonai, hear my voice, let Your ears be attentive to the call of my supplications.

3 If You, Yah, were always to take account of intentional transgressions, O God [Adonai], who could withstand [the severity of Your judgment]!

4 But forgiveness is [reserved] with You alone, so that You [i.e., Your judgment] may be feared.

5 I place the hope of my very existence only in Hashem [YKVK]. I yearn for His word.

6 My soul [yearns] for Adonai more than watchmen [of the night yearn] for the morning. More than those who watch [throughout the night vigil of this world yearn] for the dawn [of redemption].

7 Therefore, Israel, yearn to Hashem [YKVK]; for true lovingkindness is with Hashem [YKVK] alone. Redemption is with Him in infinite abundance.

8 [The time will surely come when] He will redeem Israel from all [subjugation to] its transgressions.

Discussion of Psalm 130

130:1 "Mi’mamaakim keratikha Hashem—from the depths [of my night exile] I have called You, Hashem!" The basic meaning of "calling from the depths" here is that we call out from the depths of our heart. If we don’t call out from a very deep place, we shouldn’t expect too much of a response. The Zohar adds that Hashem is also concealed in the depths of His Infiniteness. In this sense, calling from the depths means calling Hashem out of the depths of His concealment.\(^\text{33}\)

\(^{33}\)Zohar Beshalach, 2:63b.
Rabbi Chizkiyah opened his discourse: "From the depths I have called You, Hashem." (Psalm 130:1)...One who prays before the Holy King must make his requests and pray from the depths of his heart. Only thus will he be considered wholehearted with the Holy One blessed-be-He. He must align his heart and his will. [This is the meaning of "Mi’maamakim keratikha—from the depths I have called You.”]

Rivni hakhol meh "ממעמקים קראתי ווקה"...כל מיÖZייל צלאות קמי מלכוא קריוא במעמקי ענוה שני הצלאה.

But is this really what King David meant when he wrote, "Mimaamakim keratikha"? For another verse states, "Bekhol libi derashtikha—with all my heart I have sought You" (Psalm 119:10). Isn’t one verse enough? Why would he have to add that we pray mi’maamakim—from the depths?

Rather this is what we have learned: Every human being who makes his requests before the King must direct his mind and will [to draw blessing forth] me’ikara d’kol ikarin [from the root of all roots, i.e., Ein Sof flowing through Keter, Chokhmah, and Binah]. Only thus will he be able to draw blessings forth from the umka d’beira [the depths of the well, i.e., Binah], so that blessings will flow freely from the mabua d’kola [the wellspring of all (blessings), i.e., the light of Ein Sof flowing down into Chokhmah via Keter].

Again, what is it? [I.e., what is the conduit through which the blessings of the infinite Ein Sof flows?] It is [Chokhmah] the place from which the nahar (river, Binah) flows, as it is written, "Ve’nahar yotzei miEden—a river [Binah] constantly flows forth from Eden [Chokhmah]" (Genesis 2:10). [In order for the light of Ein Sof to reach us in a way that is beneficial to us, it must flow through Keter to Chokhmah to Binah, and only then to us.]

The first thing we learn from the above passage is the connection between the maamakim—depths of our heartfelt cry, and the maamakim—depths of Hashem’s infinite hiddenness. The more deeply we can enter within—and the more real and sincere our call to Hashem from that inner place—the more He will come out of His infinite concealment and reveal His presence to us. Actually, the more conscious we become, the clearer it will be that He was with us the whole time.

In addition to the above lesson, we are struck by the incredibly rich terminology of the Zohar (ikara d’kol ikarin, umka d’beira, mabua d’kola). Since this terminology is the key to the divine names and their corresponding sefirot that appear in this psalm (and in countless other verses scattered everywhere throughout the Tanakh), it is important to clarify what is going on here. However, first we must lay some important groundwork. We shall thus return to deal with this in the Appendix.

130:2 “Adonai, hear my voice, let Your ears be attentive to the call of my supplications.” The basic supposition of true prayer is that Hashem hears us; that He pays attention to us; that we matter to Him. Without this, prayer is meaningless. Nevertheless, although we may know something to be true, even about Hashem, we must never take it for granted. David therefore precedes many of his prayers with a request that Hashem hear and be attentive to what he has to say.
130:3 “If You, Yah, were always to take account of intentional transgressions, O God [Adonai], who could withstand [the severity of Your judgment]?” Alternatively, “God [Yah], if You would let intentional transgressions accumulate, O God [Adonai], who could stand up [under the burden]?”

In another place King David pleaded, “Hashem, do not rebuke me with Your fury; do not chastise me with Your wrath!” (Psalm 38:1). The Midrash explains that rebuke and chastisement are good things, as it is written, “Happy is the man whom You chastise/correct, Hashem!” (Psalm 94:12), and “Hashem reproves/corrects those whom He loves” (Proverbs 3:12). What David asked was rather that such reproof should not be out of fierce anger lest we be unable to stand up in the face of misfortune. He therefore said, “Master of all worlds, rather than becoming angry when we sin and not redeeming us, cover over our sins. Please do not rebuke us with Your fury.”

The Midrash continues and describes Israel’s panic when “our sins have multiplied above our heads and our guilt has mounted to the heavens” (Ezra 9:6). Rabbi Yitzchak said that this can be likened to a man crossing a river with a large knapsack on his head. His feet begin to sink into the mud. People call out to him: “Let go of your pack so you will be able to free your feet!” This is what the Holy One says to Israel: “Why do you say, ‘If You, God, were to always take account of our sins, O God, who could withstand Your judgment?’ Let he who has sinned rather repent of his wicked ways. Let him let go of his sins and I will have mercy on him.”

130:4 “But forgiveness is [reserved] with You alone, so that You [i.e., Your judgment] may be feared.” Alternatively, according to the following Midrash: “But You reserved [Rosh Hashanah for judgment and Yom Kippur] for forgiveness, so that You may be feared” or “so that we could truly fear losing Your love and forgiveness”.35

Rabbi Abba said: The Holy One withholds His forgiveness (like a deposit) and does not bestow it freely on Rosh Hashanah. This is the meaning of “for You reserve forgiveness with Yourself.” But why does He go to such lengths to withhold His forgiveness? [Surely, His wish is to not to withhold it!] Rather, it is “so that You may be feared,” i.e., so that we will truly be in awe before Him and repent from the depths of our hearts on Yom Kippur [and thereby deserve His forgiveness].

Malbim explains further, “The definition of forgiveness (selichah) is that a sin is taken away as if it were never done. No one but the Creator can do such a thing. Therefore there is not one place in the entire Tanakh in which forgiveness is granted by anyone other than Hashem Himself. It is in this sense that our verse emphasizes, ‘For with You alone there is forgiveness.’”

Hirsch states the same idea: “Forgiveness is solely with the Lord; He alone is capable of forgiving. The mouth of a mortal, who after all is himself in need of forgiveness, cannot pronounce the sinner pure, much less render him pure. Only He, who is as omnipotent as He is gracious, in the abundance of His grace and almighty power can perform for man that miracle of miracles, the blotting out of the consequences of his past mistakes. He alone can prevent the seeds of guilt and adversity, with which the iniquity of man filled the acre of his future, from ripening; only the Lord can help him who has grown old in sin to regain peace and purity... All the continued survival of the Jewish people is based upon the fact of this direct divine forgiveness, and even unto the nethermost depths of sin it gives Israel the inalienable awareness of the divine pardon that can be obtained at all times.”

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34 Midrash Shochar Tov on Psalm 38.
35 Midrash Shochar Tov on Psalm 130.
130:4 “Lemaan tivarey—so that You [i.e., Your judgment] may be feared.” Alternative translations of this key verse might go something like this: “Truly, it is solely in Your power to forgive. This alone makes it imperative to fear [You]” or “so that we could become aware of the impact of all wrongdoing, wake up to the awesome responsibility of being alive, and nurture true reverence for You,” or “so that [we could tremble from] fear [in Your presence],” and finally, “so that we could truly fear losing Your love and forgiveness.”

The verb tivarey is a construction of yirah (awe, reverence, fear). Yirat Hashem is the essential ingredient in coming close to and obtaining Hashem’s forgiveness. Yirah is closely related to reiyah (perception, awareness). One is a function of the other, i.e., the greater the awareness—the more we learn to perceive Hashem’s hand in our lives—the greater the awe and the reverence we feel for Him. And vice versa: to the degree that we have true yirah, the more we will literally see Hashem everywhere.

It is perhaps for this reason that the Targum on this verse translates the words “lemaan tivarey” as “min biglal d’tit’chamei—so that You may be seen or revealed.” This again shows how these two concepts, yirah and reiyah, are inextricably related. The greater the awareness, the greater the awe and the reverence.

This is especially true when we are faced with the possibility or the challenge of doing something wrong, even if no one else will ever know about it. We may try to minimize the importance of a misdeed and thereby assuage our conscience that, after all, we have not done such a great evil. Conversely, we may feel that we cannot resist the temptation, that it is too great, and that we are incapable of overcoming such a formidable test. But it is yirat Hashem, or the profound awareness that grows in the heart of one who has cultivated yirah of Hashem, that allows us to see through the smokescreen of such rationalizations.

**Fear**

In addition to awe and reverence, the third meaning of yirah is fear. But what is involved in fearing God? We turn to the Baal Shem Tov:36

A philosopher once asked, “If God is called fearsome, why does the Torah have to give us a commandment to fear Him? This fear should be automatic, like that of subjects of a king who fear and respect him without command.”

My master [the Baal Shem Tov] explained it as follows: The concept of fear is that a person is afraid of loss. This may involve the loss of honor, wealth, life, or anything else that he values. After the loss is suffered, there is no longer any fear. Thus, for example, when a person is dead, and has already lost his life, he no longer has any fear of death. The same is true of the fear of poverty and all such fears.

This is external fear. It is the same fear that exists among all living creatures. The mouse fears the cat, the cat fears the dog, and the dog fears the wolf. A person’s worldly fears are no different.

Higher than this is internal fear. This is the fear of God.

36 R. Yaacov Yoseph of Polnoye, Tzafnat Paaneiach 49c, in Baal Shem Tov al HaTorah, Ekev §17; see Kaplan, The Light Beyond, pp. 187-188.
External fear can motivate a person to internal fear. This comes from God’s love and open hand, beckoning and leading man to be motivated [by worldly fear] to the fear of God. It is thus written, “What does Hashem ask of you, but to fear Hashem your God?” (Deuteronomy 10:12). This is speaking of internal fear...

When a person does not have such internal fear, it is obvious that he has already lost his life. He is like the dead. Our sages thus tell us, “The wicked are called dead, even in their lifetime.”

This resolves the philosopher’s question. There is actually no commandment regarding [external] fear, since it is something that comes naturally.

Since such [external] fear exists among all creatures, when the Torah says, “What does Hashem ask of you but to fear Hashem your God?” it is saying that man should have a higher fear. Through his external fear, he should be motivated to a deep inner reverence of God.

**The Name Kah**

Again, verses 3-4 of our psalm read, “If You, Yah, were always to take account of intentional transgressions, O God [Adonai], who could withstand [the severity of Your judgment]? But forgiveness is [reserved] with You alone, so that You [i.e., Your judgment] may be feared.”

The Name Yah (Kah) is made up of the first two letters of YKVK. It is associated primarily with the sefirah of Chokhmah. Nevertheless, since it is spelled Yod-Heh (and the letter Heh corresponds to Binah), it represents the idea that Binah exists in Chokhmah in an undifferentiated state before it becomes expressed as a separate sefirah. Kah is thus a very exalted Name, but for this very reason is very paradoxical. Indeed, it seems to contradict the rule that the higher you go, the more love and mercy you encounter. Here, on the contrary, almost everywhere we encounter the Name Kah, we encounter judgment.

In explaining this anomaly, Ramban cites the following verse containing this Name: “Trust in Hashem forever more, for with Yah [i.e., with the letters Yod and Heh], Hashem fashioned worlds [this world and the World to Come]” (Isaiah 26:4). He then writes: 38

This means that Hashem formed worlds with the quality of judgment alluded to in the Name Yah, as well as with the quality of mercy alluded to in the Name YKVK. We see that Yah alludes to judgment in the following verses: “Yah has surely afflicted me with suffering, but He has not given me over to death!” (Psalm 118:18); “for [as long as] a hand is on Yah’s throne, Hashem is at war with Amalek, from generation to generation” (Exodus 17:16); and “If You, Yah, were always to take account of intentional transgressions, O Adonai, who could withstand [the severity of Your judgment]?” (Psalm 130:3).

This is what the sages meant when they cited the verse, “O Yah, fortunate is the person whom You discipline [through suffering] and thereby instruct in Your Torah” (Psalm 94:12), and commented, “the verse does not mention the Name YKVK, but rather Yah, in order to emphasize that this is like a man who is standing trial before a court of justice, under the scrutiny of the judge. When he hears his sentence, he cries out in anguish, ’yah yah (woe, woe), dai dai (enough, enough).’”39

37 Berakhot 18b.  
39 Bereshit Rabbah 92:1.
Again, almost everywhere we encounter the Name Kah, we encounter judgment. How can this be? I will answer with a parable by the Maggid of Mezeritch (again in the name of the Baal Shem Tov) which adds yet another dimension to the concept of fearing God:40

A father once warned his son not to go barefoot outside the house, lest he be injured. The boy joined with a group of unruly children, however, with whom he ran about barefoot. In no time at all a thorn did indeed enter his foot.

At first the boy wanted to hide from his father. He went home, but entered through the back door in order to show it to his mother. His mother, however, was extremely concerned, and called in his father. When his father saw it, he was concerned lest it cause an infection and abscess. He wanted to remove it but the child would not allow him to touch it for fear that the extraction would be too painful. The boy started to cry. The mother too started to cry, feeling the pain of her son. The father forcibly held his son in his lap, however, took a knife, and removed the thorn from his foot against his son’s will. The child cried out in pain. The mother cried as well.

In the child’s opinion, the father acted cruelly toward him because the pain of extraction was greater than the pain of the thorn entering the flesh. In truth, however, this was a healing and not a torture. Had the thorn not been removed, an abscess would have developed in the leg.

We can see, therefore, that the father’s fear cannot be compared to that of the son. The father feared lest the wound become infected and abscess. The son feared the pain of having the thorn removed. He considered this a punishment for disobeying his father. The father was not concerned with this since the pain was only momentary while removal of the thorn was for the son’s ultimate benefit.

Man’s fear is not the same as God’s. Man generally fears punishment. God, on the other hand, is saddened by the actual sin which causes a person to sink into impurity. Once the sin is done, God does not hesitate to exact punishment. After all, the punishment is meant as a remedy, to cleanse man and restore his spiritual stature. Man would do well to strive to make his fear the same as God’s.

This is the meaning of the verse, “What does God require of you, but le’yira eth Hashem Elokekha—to fear with Hashem your God” (Deuteronomy 10:12). That is, your fear should be one with God’s fear—the same as His. He is concerned lest you sin and harm yourself spiritually. This should be your concern as well. This is the true meaning of the awe or fear of Heaven.

Whereas mother is extremely empathic about the pain of her son (man), father (embodying the higher mode of Chokhmah) seems to be completely insensitive. And yet, as the Baal Shem Tov reveals to us in the end, father and mother both care for their son. It is just that they embody two different ways of being empathic and merciful. The empathy of the father might be called far-sighted or long-range empathy, while the empathy of the mother is more immediate. Certainly both are needed. And it is good to know that Hashem is both our father and our mother.

40 Likutim Yekarim 244. I have taken the liberty of embellishing the parable slightly in order to bring out the point more forcefully that the father and mother embody two different aspects of mercy and love, as opposed to judgment vs. mercy.
The Faces of Fear

Fear has many faces. Certainly we all know what it feels like to walk down the street nowadays. It is normal to be afraid. Similarly in any dangerous situation, fear is normal. It is a healthy sign that we are concerned for our own safety or for the safety of our loved ones. Why, then, does fearing God usually present such a problem for us?

One reason is because when we fear attack by a gunman or by an Arab terrorist, God forbid, our fear is of someone evil, someone who wants to hurt us. Similarly, it is natural to fear falling off a cliff, out a window, or from a plane or helicopter. All these involve real danger to our lives, causing injury and possibly death. Dying is antithetical to life.

But God is good. King David emphasizes that God’s forgiveness is a sign of His concern for our ultimate welfare, both physical and spiritual. Why then are we supposed to fear God if everything He does to us is for our good?

Just as I was first typing these thoughts into my computer, a friend, MC, phoned me from his kibbutz and said, “Avraham, now I know what fearing God is all about.” I said, “MC, you won’t believe this, but that is what I am writing about now! What did you learn?”

MC started describing his experience of working on the kibbutz with G, a master welder. He himself had just changed a blade on one of the metal saws. Before doing so, he not only made sure the machine was off, but also unplugged it. “G doesn’t do things like I do. I’m afraid; he’s not. He is a master welder and doesn’t seem to be afraid of anything. For instance, when sparks from hot metal fly into his sleeve, he doesn’t seem to care. He just keeps on welding. A master welder doesn’t stop if such a thing happens. He just goes on. And what about a jacket on fire? Once he called to me to look at him. He had real flames covering the entire front of his jacket. He doesn’t wear a non-flammable jacket because he is a master and he’s not afraid. I, on the other hand, I know what it is to be afraid!”

Pondering MC’s words, I said, “But don’t you see, MC, he also has fear, but not on the same level as you. He doesn’t do things the way he does because he is fearless, but rather because he has sublimated his fear to a different level. He has mastered the small stuff. So he pats out the flame and continues working. A little smoldering material doesn’t stop him from going on. He keeps working. Careless? Maybe, or maybe a different relationship.”

So what is fear? Surely we should have a healthy fear and respect for that which can hurt us. Anything else would be foolishness. This is the beginning. Afterwards our fear is of a different order of magnitude altogether. That is, when it comes to fearing God, our initial instinctual fear is good only if it leads to a greater awareness, not if it closes us off from God [as in the case of Adam after he sinned, “I heard Your voice in the garden and I was afraid; for I am naked; I therefore hid” (Genesis 3:10)]. When we speak of fearing God, therefore, we begin with the most basic instinct to fear pain and hurt. This is why MC would be foolish if he were not more careful than his teacher. However, this initial fear is only meant to jolt us out of complacency, to let us know that there are times when we are not in control.

In extreme cases we might even find ourselves in such a frightening situation that we begin to tremble uncontrollably from fear. Without our knowing it, our body has been put on red-alert. Adrenaline is being produced in enormous amounts. Our first reaction to this burst of nervous-energy, however, is to sweat and tremble. First, this breaks the seemingly impenetrable shell of defenses with which we surround ourselves. We are naked, exposed, defenseless. We are afraid. Next, we channel the adrenaline and begin to take hold of ourselves. Only thus can we hope to deal with the situation at hand. On the contrary, as a result of such a release of
adrenaline into our bloodstream, we are now capable of superhuman feats, of going beyond our normal strength, of being able to save ourselves and others.

The same dynamic applies to fear of God. The ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are like a jolt to awaken us out of our stupor, and most importantly, to release powerful energies (that are presently either dormant or being misused) in order to come close to Hashem.

Again, the key phrase in Psalm 130 is lemaan tivarey (so that You may be feared). Indeed, this phrase might very well be the source for one of the central prayers on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur:

O place Your awe/fear, Hashem our God, on all You have made, Your dread/terror on all You have created. Then all that You have made will revere You, and all You have created will bow down before You. They will all come together in unison to do Your will wholeheartedly. For we know, Hashem our God, that absolute rule is Yours, invincible power is in Your [left] hand, restraint is in Your right hand, and Your Name is awesome over all that You have created.

In this prayer the sages are teaching us what lemaan tivarey means to them. This is what R. Alexander Ziskiner, the author of Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah, says about this passage:⁴¹

My brothers and friends, you should know that almost the entire nusach (formula) of the prayers of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is solely for the purpose of sanctifying His great name among all the nations and throughout the entire world.

This is the essence of the prayers now during these days of awe.

Therefore, a person must be careful to feel tzar (pain) in his heart, and to cry especially on this great and awesome Day of Judgment—whenever the prayer mentions anything in regard to the chillul (profanation) of His great name (i.e., the exile of His Shekhinah), may His name be blessed.

Pray from the depths of your heart, more and more intensely than any of the prayers you pray for yourself. For this is the entirety of what a person is, now, at this time, while we are still in exile, to cry and feel tzar constantly for the chillul of His great name among the nations of the world, worshippers of wood and stone, the work of men’s hands. For they mock and laugh at us, the holy nation, and say, “Where is your God? Let Him rise up and save you!”

The secret of arousing our heart to cry is to say the words of the prayers slowly, very slowly, pausing every once in a while and crying.

For instance, when you say, “Ubekhen ten pachdekha Hashem Elokenu al kol mah shebarata—O place Your awe/fear on all You have made,” think in your heart, “How long will Your great name (Shekhinah) be deprecated among the nations. In order to stop this, put fear in their hearts, so that they will all know that there is no other power but Yours, and so that Your name will be magnified and acknowledged by all.”

⁴¹ Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah, 11th Gate, pp. 299-300.
130:6-8 “I place the hope of my very existence only in Hashem. I yearn for His word. My soul [yearns] for God more than watchmen [of the night yearn] for the morning. More than those who watch [during the night of this world yearn] for the dawn [of redemption]. Therefore, Israel, yearn to Hashem; for true lovingkindness is with Hashem [alone]. Redemption is with Him in infinite abundance. [The time will surely come when] He will redeem Israel from all [subjugation to] its transgressions.”

During the year, we (our vital energies) become trapped in our sins. Without knowing it, we act out of compulsion; we become slaves to acting, speaking, and thinking in ways that are detrimental to ourselves and others. Teshuvah (repentance, returning to HaShem) involves reclaiming ourselves and our vital energies from the compulsions in which we and they have become trapped. Through our sincere teshuvah, Hashem not only forgives us, but literally frees and redeems us from being subjugated to our transgressions (the very actions that were preventing redemption; our own personal redemption and the redemption of the world). He then transforms our sins into merits, for they are now seen as having been stepping stones to getting closer to Him.

This psalm is made up of eight verses. The first four verses begin with our calling out to Hashem as You, i.e., directly in the second person. We do this in order to break through the feeling of unworthiness that insinuates itself subtly within our psyche, blocking us from functioning fully and preventing us from being able to put our finger on what exactly the problem is.

What are we to do? Unload before Hashem; come clean before Him; bare our hearts—including all the pain and the frustration, and yes, even the resentment we feel. He actually likes this, as per the strange Midrash about all the king’s servants who throw their garbage into the courtyard of the royal palace. Instead of getting angry, however, the king actually rejoices! This corresponds to our enumerating our sins on Yom Kippur. How happy the king is that this garbage is no longer hidden inside our rooms where it can pollute everything we do.42

So we call out from our personal soul-exile and alienation—and this applies equally to the individual as well as to the entire people of Israel—and we say “I call out to You!”

But in the final four verses we switch back into the indirect third-person address, in which we speak ABOUT Hashem, as opposed to TO Hashem.

One possible explanation for the switch into the third-person (at least in terms of the context of the Shachrit prayers here, where we say Tehillim 130 just prior to Kaddish and Barekhu) is that redemption as an historical event is in the future. However, during prayer in general and specifically during the Shachrit Morning Prayer, the future becomes more and more present as we go higher up and deeper into the service. So here the switch into third-person means that the future is that element of the present that is presently hidden—but it is this element that we wish to make contact with as we go to the next stage in the prayers.

Therefore the psalmist can say with such certainty, “He will indeed redeem Israel from all its transgressions,” i.e., the promise of Israel’s future redemption is just as certain as the present exile. It will grow out of this exile. It will transform what now seems to prevent redemption (i.e., our sins) into the very thing that brings the redemption. But this is only if Israel returns in teshuvah, returns to Hashem, yearns for Him to reveal Himself in the present (You) just as He will be revealed in the future (He).

42 Tana d’Bei Eliyahu, Perek Aleph, s.v. yamim yutzaru velo echad bahem.
Chapter 4

Forgiveness on Yom Kippur

The Dynamics of Forgiveness

As we all probably know, there is an important minhag (custom) before Kal Nidre for everyone to forgive everyone else for whatever wrongs they may have committed against us (ben adam le’chavero—between man and his fellow).

In the Sefardi Machzor (based on the Ari and the Ben Ish Chai), we say:

Master of the world! Behold I pardon and forgive every single Israelite—man or woman, child or adult—who has ever wronged me. [I forgive them] whether they sinned against me under duress or willfully, whether inadvertently or deliberately, whether by word or by deed, whether in this lifetime or in any other incarnation; whether [they injured] my body or caused me monetary loss, whether [they offended] my honor or inflicted me with any pain or anguish; whether whatever they did is known to me or not; whether I have forgotten or not. For all, I pardon and forgive every single Israelite, completely, with a willing heart and soul.

When everyone forgives everyone else (ben adam le’chavero), then Hashem can forgive us (ben adam la’Makom—between man and God). If, however, we can’t truly forgive another in our heart, we can’t get close to Hashem. What do we gain from forgiving someone else? If we clean ourselves—if we get out of the way and trust the true Judge—we will be able to truly connect to His Oneness and to our own selves in a much deeper way.

This minhag was even introduced into the Kriat Shma sh’al HaMitah (the Bedtime Shma), in which we say:

Master of the world, I hereby [declare my desire to] pardon anyone who has angered or irritated me, or who has offended me, whether [they injured] my body or caused me monetary loss, whether [they offended] my honor or [damaged] anything belonging to me, whether under duress or willfully, whether inadvertently or deliberately, whether by word or by deed, whether in this lifetime or in any other incarnation. [I forgive and retract any complaint I may have had against] any person, and may no human being ever [have to suffer or] be punished on my account.

There is a problem here: The only way we can say these words and mean them is if we get over always thinking that it is the other person who is wrong. If we always think it’s someone else’s fault, we miss the whole point of why Hashem set us up with these specific relationships in this lifetime. Heaven set us up with these relationships to fix something in ourselves.

That is why we say this prayer every night. In our bed, at night, in deep hitbodedut, we realize that the only way we can clear our relationship with Hashem (the most important thing in our life), and remove whatever barriers we have created between us, is to ask for His forgiveness. But why should He forgive us if we’re not willing to forgive others? When we become the kind of person who is capable of forgiving others who have hurt us, we can then ask for Hashem’s complete forgiveness.
To the extent that we can forgive others, we begin to take responsibility for our life and are no longer victims of circumstance.

Taking responsibility doesn’t mean taking the blame. It has nothing to do with feeling guilty and ashamed. That’s not what Hashem wants from us. Rather, as I understand it, taking responsibility involves waking up to a higher meaning in our lives; realizing that there is a Director; that nothing happens by chance. If nothing happens by chance, then whatever we have gone through, whatever we have suffered—whether inside (our inner makeup) or outside (in relation to others)—all of it was somehow meant to teach us something.

Most of us don’t know what we really came to fix. But if we think about it, the people in our lives who have done things that really bother us—who get us angry and irritate us—these are the people who are doing us the greatest favor. We begin to realize that it is not the people who are the problem but rather our reaction to them.

So the first thing we need to do is fix ourselves. Then we can see everyone else with new eyes. For whatever reason (perhaps leftover energy patterns from past *gilgulim*), they just had the unfortunate privilege of being chosen to get under our skin. Our job is to see beyond our immediate reaction of being hurt, to see who the other person really is, and to awaken our compassion for them—for who they are and how much they are suffering. They were basically just messengers. By working on ourselves in this way, we not only have a chance of breaking old energy patterns from previous *gilgulim* but of creating incredibly positive new ones with the very people who seemed most problematic.

Everything depends on our awaking to the higher reality of why we were born. Once we awaken to this higher reality, a lot of things start to make sense. Forgiving others (as opposed to holding grudges and taking revenge) opens the way for us to overcome the erroneous dichotomy that we have created between "*ben adam le’chavero*" and "*ben adam la’Makom.***" The true unity of these two is encoded in the *gematria* of two key verses in the Torah.

The *gematria* of “*ve’ahavta et Hashem Elokekha*—love Hashem your God” (Deuteronomy 6:5)—is 907. Similarly, exactly as written and spelled in the Torah, the *gematria* of "*ve’ahavta lere’akha kamokha Ani Hashem*—love your friend as yourself, I am Hashem” (Leviticus 19:18)—is also 907.

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This realization of the importance of other human beings in our lives in turn allows us to forgive ourselves, because we are now taking responsibility for our destiny instead of being victims. This allows us to forgive Hashem for the way He made us, filled with problems and discomfort.

This is VERY difficult. It involves a threefold action that may seem insurmountable at first sight: We have to forgive ourselves. We have to forgive others (especially our parents). We have to forgive and make peace with Hashem for the way He made us.
But consider the rewards! When we finally do get it together, we will look back and realize the tremendous chesed Hashem did by making us the way He did, by putting us in such dysfunctional situations, thereby allowing us to feel and experience the consequences of our wrong actions. In addition to all this, in the end, we realize that it wasn't only our pain that we endured, but Hashem's pain as well, the pain of the Shekhinah.

In this way we will be more grateful for everything (including the garbage) than we could possibly have been if life had been in Gan Eden from beginning to end! That's incredible.

**Kriat Shma sh’al HaMitah**

The *Kriat Shma sh’al HaMitah* prayer is taken directly from the Yom Kippur service, in which a major distinction is made between sins “between man and man,” and “between man and God.”

The Mishnah quotes the verse, "Letaher etkhem mikol chatoteikhem lifnei Hashem titharu— to purify you from all your unintentional sins; before Hashem you shall be cleansed" (Leviticus 16:30), and states: “The words ‘before Hashem’ teach us that Yom Kippur atones only for sins between man and God. It does not atone for sins between man and man, however, until a person appeases his friend [by making amends and asking his forgiveness].”

*Chayey Adam* explains this important distinction:

A person must be exceedingly careful to rectify those wrongs done to his fellow man, for which Yom Kippur does not atone... He must return the stolen object (for example) and make total amends with his friend in order to gain his forgiveness. [Only then can he turn to Hashem and ask for His forgiveness.]

For behold, when a man wrongs his fellow, his sin is double. First, he sins against the man; second, he sins against the Holy One for having transgressed His commandments. If, therefore, he has not yet appeased his friend, what good does it do to confess his sin before Hashem? Isn’t the main point of viduy (confession) one’s solemn declaration that he completely forsakes and regrets having sinned? If he has not yet appeased his friend, it is like trying to become pure [in a mikveh] while holding on to a dead rodent.

It is therefore of utmost importance that we hasten to make amends with our fellow man until he forgives us for whatever wrong we have done him. Then, all that will be left will be the sin “between man and God,” and for this, teshuvah (repentance) suffices, as King David said in his own psalm of teshuvah: “Against You alone have I sinned!” (Psalm 51:6). David’s intention is this: “Since the sin I have committed was not against another human being, but against You, You are free to forgive me.” In sum: Only after a person has set things right with his fellow man can he turn to Hashem to ask forgiveness.

We can now understand the importance of “forgiving and retracting any complaint we may have had against our fellow Jew so that no man should ever have to suffer or be punished on our account.” Every night (which is a miniature of Yom Kippur) we wish to clear the slate between ourselves and our fellow man before we begin asking forgiveness for ourselves.

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43 Yoma 8:9; Gemara Yoma 85b.
44 *Chayey Adam*, Chelek Beit, Clal 143.
(We also hope that all other Jews are doing the same thing, namely, cleansing their hearts of any grudge or hatred against us.) Only then can all of us hope to stand before Hashem and return to Him without anyone else's claims or accusations preventing our being accepted before Him.

Of course there are still some diehards who prefer to hold a grudge against someone else. Let's remember, though, that the Torah commands us not to hold a grudge. Is it not enough that the other person will have to deal directly with God? Do we need to take matters into our own hands to ensure that justice will be done? Again, we have far more to gain by leaving the judgment to God. Holding a grudge against a fellow human being is saying in effect that we don't trust the Judge to arrive at a correct decision.

We Are Judged as We Judge Others

If we stand back a moment and look at this objectively, not blinded by anger and pain, we see that by wanting to weigh the scales of justice against someone else, we are actually condemning ourselves. How do we know this? We know it from dreams; we know it from the Zohar, and we know it from the Baal Shem Tov. First, we read in the Zohar:45

“ולבתר... הוא אודי על כלא בפומיה. וכדין קיימי עליה תלת שליחן וחשבי יומוי וחובוי וכל מה דעבד בהאי עלמא על... על立面( א בהאי"ד)ובידיה כלהו חתימין למידן ליה בההוא... ד בְּיַד כָּל אָדָם יַחְתּוֹםל... הוא חתים עליה בידיה... מנייהוקדמאי ועל בתראי על חדתי ועל עתיקי לא אתנשי חד... מלחתי המ הליל הרֶשֶׁת ממעות אלצנו מסעיך על רוחיה.”

[Rebbi Elazar] continued, quoting the verse, “Every man’s hand signs; to know all the deeds a man has done [so that he will understand and accept his judgment before Heaven]” (Job 37:7). Come see what this verse teaches us: On that day when a man completes his days, and his time comes to depart from this world, it is a day when the body’s power over the soul is finally broken, and the soul must depart from it. At that moment a person is given permission [i.e., Heaven opens a person’s eyes and he is permitted] to perceive what he was not allowed to perceive as long as the body was in charge and stood strong. [In other words, he is given permission to behave the Shekhinah.]

At that moment three angelic messengers come to him to make an accounting of his days; [the one from the right side recording his merits; the one from the left recording his demerits. [In short, he is judged for] all he did while alive in this world. After seeing everything with his own eyes [from the point of view of Heaven], he admits fully to everything they tell him, with his mouth. After, he then signs with his hand. This is the meaning of “every man’s hand signs.” [By accepting the judgment of the angels and signing, in effect, this teaches us that every man determines his own judgment.] All his deeds are thus recorded: the deeds of his youth and of his old age; the deeds that he himself initiated and the deeds of his forebears that he merely continued. Nothing is left

45 Zohar Lekh Lekha, 1:78b–79a. This same teaching is brought in the Talmud as well (Taanit 11a).
out. This is the meaning of [the second half of the verse] “to know all the deeds a man has done [so that he will understand and accept his judgment before Heaven].”

The Baal Shem Tov taught a similar important lesson about this based on an incident in King David’s life. Rebbe Nachman of Breslov thus taught in the name of his grandfather:  

I heard in the name of the Baal Shem Tov: Before any decree of fate is issued by Heaven against anyone in the world, everybody in the world is assembled in order to determine whether all agree to that verdict. So too the very man against whom this sentence has been passed—he is asked if he agrees. And when he does, the verdict is given. May Heaven spare us.

Now, of course, if he is asked explicitly about himself, he will certainly deny his guilt and protest that it is not a correct verdict. [In order to get an objective opinion from him] however, he is deceived. He is asked to judge another case, similar to his. When he then pronounces judgment on that case, the verdict he has pronounced is rendered [against him]...

This is the meaning of the Mishnah, “Nifraim min ha’adam mi’daato ve’shlo mi’daato—payment is exacted from a man, whether he is aware of it or not.” That is, “mi’daato—he is aware of it,” for he is asked his opinion. At the same time, however, “ve’shlo mi’daato—he is not aware,” for he is not told that he is deciding his own fate.

As Rebbe Nachman goes on to mention, this is exactly what happened to King David.

King David wanted to marry Bathsheva. The problem was that she was already married to Uriyah. David thus sent a note to Yoav, his commander-in-chief, to make sure Uriyah would be properly taken care of: “And in the morning, David wrote a letter to Yoav, saying: Send Uriyah to the frontlines in the heat of the battle; then withdraw from him so that he will be hit and die” (II Samuel 11:15).

David then waited until Bathsheva had risen up from mourning for Uriyah. Without delay, he sent for her and married her, and she bore a son. This entire strategy which David had conceived did not please Hashem. Hashem therefore sent Nathan the prophet to David. He came to David and told him the following parable:

There were two men in one city, one rich and one poor. The rich man had vast numbers of flocks and herds. The poor man had nothing except one tiny lamb which he had bought and reared. And this lamb grew up together with him and his children. It ate from his bread and drank from his cup. It lay down next to him and was like his own daughter. [One day] a wayfarer came to the rich man. Unable to bring himself to take from his own flocks and herds in order to prepare a meal for the guest, he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared a meal for the man (II Samuel 12:1-4).

Hearing this, David was temporarily caught off guard. Thinking that Nathan was talking about someone else, David became indignant and enraged at the evil that had been perpetrated by the rich man. He said to Nathan: “As Hashem lives, the man that has done this is worthy of dying. He shall also restore the lamb fourfold because he did this thing and because he had no pity” (II Samuel 12:5-6).

46 Likutey Moharan I 113.
The opening had been made. Nathan now turned the key:

And Nathan said to David: "You are the man! 'Thus says Hashem, God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel...why have you despised Hashem's command and done evil in His sight, slaying Uriyah the Chiti with the sword, taking his wife for yourself...?! Now the sword shall not cease from your house forever, because you have despised Me and taken the wife of Uriyah the Chiti as your wife.' So says Hashem: 'Behold, I shall raise evil against you from your own household. I shall take your wives away in front of your own eyes, and give them to your fellowman who will lie with them in broad daylight. Though you acted in secrecy, I shall perform this deed in the presence of all Israel and in broad daylight!'” David immediately confessed to Nathan, "I have surely sinned against Hashem!" (II Samuel 12:7-13).

Although King David was completely unaware of it, the precise verdict which he pronounced was to be carried out against himself; he was to pay a fourfold payment and be put to death by the sword. When he said, "I have surely sinned against Hashem," this was David's repentance, as a result of which the death-penalty was rescinded. He was, however, made to pay through the suffering he endured from four of his children: Amnon, Tamar, Avshalom, and the first infant that Bathsheva bore him (Rashi, II Samuel 12:6).

Delving deeper into Nathan haNavi’s parable, the sages identify the wayfarer in this verse as none other than the yetzer hara, the notorious evil inclination. They point out that the three different words used to designate the wayfarer in this verse represent a clear progression. Rashi comments:

The evil inclination is first likened here to a passing helekh (wayfarer) [who shows no indication of wanting to stay longer than a few moments]. Then he is likened to an oreyach (guest) who takes up temporary residence. In the end he is likened to the ish (man) of the house. Such is the way of the evil inclination. He begins as a wayfarer, enjoys all the advantages of being a guest, and finally takes his place as permanent master of the house.

In sum, as the Baal Shem Tov intimated, we are shown a kind of movie every night in which somebody wrongs somebody else. Afterwards, we are asked to render our judgment regarding what punishment (if any) need be administered to the guilty party or parties. As we saw in the Zohar, we are even required to sign a document stating that such and such is our final decision.

Of course, the Director of the movie is the Grand Master. He catches us off guard every time by devising the perfect story. Strangely enough, although the minutest details of the story correspond to our own life-situation, we fail to recognize the characters. But, after we have signed, we begin to realize that we have just signed our own sentence! Clearly we are judged the way we judge others.

We sometimes dream at night and all we can remember in the morning are a few details. Once in a while, if we are fortunate, we are allowed to remember more. It is behind these dreams, however, that the real story takes place—the story of our soul’s ascent into the spiritual dimension; the story that is completely forgotten the moment we open our eyes.

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48 Succah 52b.
This is similar to the moment before we are born, when our guardian angel strikes us on the lip, and we forget everything we saw in heaven. Now, except in rare cases, all that most of us have left are these dream fragments. If, on top of this, our lives are just a dream, we are really in trouble. What are we to do? Well, at least we should pray to get some insight into the dreams of our lives through the dreams of our sleep! There might just be a deeper connection between them than we know.

Returning to the previous point, dealing with grudges, we can now say that it is rather arrogant to think that we have to add our two cents, lest, God forbid, Hashem not take care of things according to our liking. We have much more to gain by rectifying our relationships between our fellow man than by eating our insides out by holding grudges. And it is here, on Yom Kippur, and also in the quiet of the night, on our beds, alone with ourselves and Hashem, that such thoughts should penetrate our hearts and stir us to better our ways.

49 Niddah 30b.
Chapter 5

Atonement

The Essence of the Day Atones

The Talmud quotes Rebbi (Rabbi Yehudah the Prince):  

Rebbi said: For any and all transgressions in the Torah, whether one did teshuvah or not, Yom Kippur atones!

That is, the power of Yom Kippur itself is so strong—the revelation of Godliness on this day is so powerful—that we are cleansed of every wrongdoing we have ever done even if we haven’t consciously returned in teshuvah!

Of course the halakhah is not like Rebbi for the simple reason that someone might use it as an excuse to do wrong. After all, why not do whatever we want, if Yom Kippur is going to cleanse us anyway? In order to make sure that this doesn’t happen, the rabbis of the Talmud who disagree with Rebbi (and the Rambam who rules like them) place teshuvah in the foreground, so to speak, and Yom Kippur in the background. Teshuvah is absolutely necessary to atone for any and all transgressions. Rambam thus writes:

In our time, when there is no Beit HaMikdash, and we do not have the altar of atonement, there is only teshuvah. Teshuvah atones for all transgressions. Even if a person were wicked his entire life, and returned in teshuvah only in his final moments, we do not remind him of his former wickedness, as it is written, “The wicked man shall not [be made to] stumble in his former wickedness on the day he returns from his wickedness” (Ezekiel 33:12). Itzumo shel yom [the essence power or awesomeness of Yom Kippur Day] atones for those who return in teshuvah, as it is written, “For on this day He will atone for you, to purify you from all your wrongdoings [before Hashem]. Before Hashem you will be purified” (Leviticus 16:30).

Rambam is very clear: In order for Yom Kippur to atone, we must return in teshuvah. As above, however, Rambam’s ruling is not meant to negate the hidden power of Yom Kippur to cleanse even in the absence of teshuvah, but rather to make sure that this power is not misused.

We have a rule: Even if Rebbi’s statement concerning the power of Yom Kippur has to remain HIDDEN, behind the scenes, still, it is there. Even Rambam and the rabbis of the Talmud, who disagree with Rebbi, do not disagree in principle that the power of the day atones. They merely require that we do something to deserve this atonement.

But we can still ask: What is the source of Yom Kippur’s power to cleanse and atone and heal us from the effects of all our wrongdoings?

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50 Yoma 85b.
51 Rambam, Hilkhos Teshuvah 1:3.
The Maor VaShemesh (R. Kalonymous Kalman Epstein of Krakow, 1754-1823, chief disciple of R. Elimelekh of Lizensk, 1717-1787) brings us closer to the answer we need. He tells us (see text below) that the power of Yom Kippur to atone—even without consciously returning in teshuvah—is alluded to in the last word of the verse the Rambam quoted (Leviticus 16:30):

כִּי בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם

In Hebrew, this last word is titharu. Titharu (pronounced tit’haru) means "you shall be purified." The numerical value of this word is 620, the same as Keter (Crown).

What is significant about this? Keter (Crown) represents the light that Hashem wished to shine into creation long before He created the world. Why didn't He reveal this light immediately? It is so strong that it would completely overwhelm the world. He therefore held it back.

But the whole unfolding of history is a process of getting closer and closer to the full revelation of this light. In the merit of our receiving and living the Torah, of internalizing its directives, of knowing Hashem even in the midst of a world that occludes His existence, and even brings His existence into question, we are fashioning the vessels with which we will be able to handle (be cleansed by, and even absorb, rejoice in, and become transformed by) the great light of Keter, the revelation of the Infinite One into the finite fabric of creation.

Thus on the same page in the Talmud that records Rebbi’s statement, the following Mishnah appears:

ואמר רבי עקיבא איגריבך ישראל לפני מי אתם מטהרין מי מטהר אתכם ממים טהורים וטהרתם מכול טמאותיכם ומכל גוליםיכם אетеיכם קדיש입니다 מ":מ בהברת ישראל א והאמר:ף הקדוש ברוך הוא מטהר את ישראל את הטמאים א

Rabbi Akiva said: Happy are you, O Israel! Lifnei Mi atem metaharim—before Whom do you purify yourselves? U'Mi metaher etkhem—and Who purifies you? None other than your Father in Heaven! As it is written, "I shall sprinkle the purifying waters [of My Torah] upon you and you shall be purified" (Ezekiel 36:25). And it is written, "Hashem is the mikveh (hope) of Israel" (Jeremiah 17:13)—just as a mikveh (bath) purifies the impure, so does [hoping in] the Holy One purify Israel.

Rabbi Akiva brings two prophetic verses which speak of being cleansed—first by being sprinkled with pure waters, and then by being completely submerged in these same waters. First of all, we need to know the context in which these words were said. This Mishnah appears in the eighth perek (chapter) of Mesekhet Yoma. Its whole context is Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). Rabbi Akiva gave this teaching after the destruction of the Second Temple. Let's remember that the entire service of Yom Kippur in the Temple revolved around the Cohen Gadol (High Priest). The destruction of the Temple was extremely traumatic. The Jewish people felt that life was over. Without the Temple, who could go on? Without the Cohen Gadol performing the service, who could obtain atonement? However, Yom Kippur itself is another code-word for Olam Haba. This amazing day comes around each year to give us an opportunity to become completely cleansed and freed from all that imprisoned us during the rest of the year.
True, we no longer have the Temple and the service of the Cohen Gadol, but we are never severed from Hashem’s mercies. He is the One who will sprinkle cleansing waters on us; He is the One who will purify us. And here we come to the double meaning of the word mikveh. Physically, mikveh is a bath in whose pure waters we immerse in order to become pure and clean and free from the dark forces that try to obscure Hashem’s light. Spiritually, mikveh (like tikvah) means hope. Rabbi Akiva’s greatness was his ability to see the light in the darkness. He was thus able to give us hope even in the midst of exile. He understood that the only waters that can heal the Jewish soul are the pure waters of hoping in Hashem, knowing that, no matter what, He is with us.

One of the many code-words in the Tanakh for the higher dimensional reality known as Olam Haba is Mi. In simple Hebrew the word mi means “who?” In the code-language of Sod [Kabbalah], however, it refers to Olam Haba. One reason for this is its gematria (numerical value): 50 ($\text{mem} = 40$, $\text{yod} = 10$). We can now understand the depths of Rabbi Akiva’s words:

“Lifnei Mi atem metaharim—before Mi do you purify yourselves” corresponds to the 49 steps that lead up to Mi, i.e., that precede the level of the Great 50, just as the 49 days of the Omer precede Shavuot, and the 49 years of the seven Shmittahs precede the 50th year of the Yovel (Jubilee). These 49 symbolic steps essentially constitute the work that we have to do to prepare the vessels to receive the light that Hashem wishes to give us.

“U’Mi metaher etkhem—and Mi purifies you” corresponds to the level of the Great 50, the infinite light of Ein Sof flowing down through Keter to Chokhmah to Binah, crowning our efforts beyond anything we could ever attain on our own.

The Torah usually emphasizes the work that we have to do, rather than the larger framework or context within which this work takes place. Nevertheless, the other side of the coin is always present.

Yes, we live in olam hazeh (this world), that dimension of reality in which Hashem purposely constricted and occluded His great love for us in order to give us the greatest gift possible, namely, the ability to attain our own perfection. But this doesn’t take place in a vacuum. Behind this is Olam Haba, not just the World-to-Come in a simplistic sense, as if it will eventually exist but doesn’t yet exist. No, Olam Haba is the greater context within which olam hazeh takes place. In fact it is the only context within which the existential condition of olam hazeh makes sense.

This hidden-but-always-present all-pervasive level of Olam Haba is what Yechezkel and Yirmiyahu refer to in the above Mishnah. From that overriding level of Hashem’s love, “I shall cast/sprinkle pure waters upon you and you shall be purified” (Ezekiel 36:25); “Hashem is the mikveh (hope) of Israel” (Jeremiah 17:13). In both verses Hashem’s love for us (the level of Olam Haba that streams down into olam hazeh to lift us up and free us) is couched in a metaphor of water. 53

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53 Based on the idea that lifney Mi corresponds to the 49 steps that lead up to the great Mi (50), the verse in Yechezkel which speaks about sprinkling refers to the divine assistance that we receive during the self-purification period. Although these are only "drops," we need them to help us continue on as we make our way towards our goal. The verse from Yirmiyahu which speaks of complete and utter submersion in Hashem’s loving waters corresponds to the level of Mi (50) itself.

The dynamic is always the same: We are always asked to do the best we can to start the process of return. In the Zohar this is known as itaruta d’letata (awakening-from-below). We are given assistance during this period, but it is more subtle and hidden. This is the level of Yechezkel’s drops of water. Only after we have made
The difference is that Yechezkel’s sprinkling corresponds with the measured drops of divine assistance we receive during the forty-nine day period leading up the great fifty (lifney mi). Yirmiyahu’s mikveh, on the other hand, corresponds with the total immersion of the fiftieth day. But it is precisely then that we can look back and know and appreciate the incredible value of the drops we received during the forty-nine days.

The Yom Kippur Service

In order to fully savor the following powerful teaching from the Maor VaShemesh, let’s look at the text from the Mussaf Service of Yom Kippur to which he refers:

He [the Cohen Gadol] made his way to the seir hamishtaleach (Yom Kippur scapegoat) that was to be sent to Azazel, to confess over it the sins of the congregation. He laid both his hands upon it and confessed, and thus did he say: "O God! [he would actually pronounce the letters of the name YKVK in a special way], Your people, the house of Israel, have erred, they have willfully transgressed, they have rebelled before You. O God [YKVK]! Please atone for the errors, the willful transgressions, and the rebellious crimes that Your people the house of Israel have committed before You! [Atone for them,] as it is written in the Torah of Moshe Your servant, ‘For on this day He will atone for you, to purify you from all your wrongdoings before YKVK.’"

And the Cohanim and the people who were standing in the azarah (courtyard) of the Beit HaMikdash—when they heard the glorious awesome Shem HaMeforash (Explicit NAME) come forth from the mouth of the Cohen Gadol, with sanctity and purity—they would bend their knees, bow down and prostrate themselves, and say, “Barukh shem kevod malkhuto le’olam va’ed—may the name [i.e., revelation] of the glory [radiance] of His kingship [hidden providence] be blessed [drawn down, and ever increased to illuminate the darkness of this world, now and] for all eternity!” He [the Cohen Gadol timed it so that he] would complete the utterance of the Name to coincide with their blessing. He would then pronounce over them [the last word in the verse], “Titharu” (you shall be purified)!

The Maor VaShemesh writes: 54

The effort to begin (seemingly against all odds), does Hashem arouse and reveal His great light from above (itaruta d’le’ela). This is the level of Yirmiyahu’s mikveh.

This dynamic is embodied in certain sets of verses scattered throughout the Torah: (A) "You shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart" (Deuteronomy 10:16); (B) "Hashem your God will circumcise your heart" (Deuteronomy 30:6). (A) You shall return to Hashem your God and heed His call" (Deuteronomy 4:40, 30:2); (B) "Hashem your God will return/restore your captivity and have mercy on you; He will return and gather you from among all the nations to which you have been scattered” (Deuteronomy 30:3).

54 Maor VaShemesh, Rimzey Yom HaKippurim, s.v. vehaCohanim.
You must put your heart to this: Why precisely on Yom Kippur did they bend their knees [and bow and prostrate themselves] when they heard the Name come forth from the Cohen Gadol’s mouth? Behold, they used to pronounce Havayah [YKVK] every day in the Beit HaMikdash exactly as it is written. Why didn’t they bow at these other times? It is also important to know the meaning of the expression Shem HaMeforash (the Explicit Name). At first sight this is superfluous, for in the Beit HaMikdash they never said anything else but the Explicit Name. It would therefore have been enough to write “the glorious awesome Name.”

The matter, however, is as follows: Certainly, every day of the year, even though the tzadikim were making yichudim (divine unifications) [i.e., using gematria and letter-permutations to reveal the divine energy-level behind every physical being and object, and behind the physical world in general], and thereby elevating the external aspect of the world to its divine root, still, the light of Keter was not revealed [directly, in such a powerful way] except on Yom Kippur. It was only on Yom Kippur that the light of Keter Elyon would be revealed over Israel for the entirety of that holy day. And it was precisely this [exalted revelation] that would purify Israel on this day, as the verse states, “For on this day He will atone for you, to purify you from all your wrongdoings; for on this day He will atone for you, to purify you from all your wrongdoings; before YKVK titharu —you will be purified!” In the word titharu, Keter is alluded to, for titharu has the numerical value of 620, the same as Keter.

It is for this reason that there is an opinion among the mekubalim to say Kedushat Keter even during the repetition of the Yom Kippur Shachrit Amidah! [Keter is usually said only for the repetition of Mussaf on Shabbat and holidays, but the opinion of the mekubalim is understandable since the etzem (essence) of the day is permeated with the light of Keter]. This also explains why there was no bowing and prostrating during the rest of the year when the Explicit Name was mentioned. The yichud (unification) [i.e., magnitude of revelation] of Olam Haba (the spiritual level) behind oam hazeh (the physical level) was simply not as great as on those other days.

On Yom Kippur, on the other hand, when the Cohen Gadol would intend to draw down the light of Keter when he mentioned the glorious awesome name, it became impossible not to bow down in the face of the magnitude of the sanctity and the awesome brightness of the revelation that was beyond all comprehension! This is the meaning of “when they heard the glorious awesome Shem HaMeforash (Explicit Name) come forth from the mouth of the Cohen Gadol, with sanctity and purity, they would bend their knees, bow down and prostrate themselves, and say, 'Barukh shem kevod malkhuto le’olam va’ed—may the name [i.e., revelation] of the glory [radiance] of His kingship [hidden providence] be blessed [drawn down and ever increased to illuminate the darkness of this world, now and] for all eternity!’” Clearly, it [their bowing] was a result of the special intention that the Cohen Gadol had when he uttered the name—the intention to draw down the light of Keter. This is what they heard.
This also explains why the expression "Shem HaMeforash" is used—for meforash has the numerical value of 620 that alludes to Keter. This is why they bowed. Again, when this name was mentioned in this way on Yom Kippur, it was impossible not to bow! So they fell on their faces from the magnitude of the sanctity and the awesome brightness of the revelation of Keter Elyon, which is beyond comprehension. This is why the text continues, "He [the Cohen Gadol timed it that he] would complete the utterance of the name to coincide with their blessing." That is, he would utter the name with the intention of drawing down the sanctity of Keter. He would then pronounce the last word in the verse, titharu, in order to draw down the revelation of the light of the sanctity of Keter that is alluded to in the numerical value of the word titharu.

Everything in olam hazeh is a combination of God and man, man and God. In the Beit HaMikdash (the most powerful spot on earth), on Yom Kippur (the most powerful day of the year), the divine component of the God-man equation was at its maximum. As a result of that powerful convergence of time (Yom Kippur) and place (the Beit HaMikdash), the Cohen Gadol (the holiest representative of the Jewish people) consciously intended to maximize the highest revelation of Godliness into the world.

At most times and in most places Hashem is more hidden, and it is incumbent upon us to do the maximum we can without revealed help from above. Even when the Mikdash is not standing physically, and even when it is not Yom Kippur, that awesome revelation of the future is still there. It is just hidden. It is the hidden reality of Olam Haba that exists behind the constricted reality of our world. This is why, after having experienced the awesome revelation of Yom Kippur, we can now access that level of revelation in consciousness at any moment and in any place.

We have thus established that Yom Kippur’s amazing power to atone and cleanse comes from Keter, which is none other than the light of Olam Haba that will become fully revealed in the future (but which is nevertheless never inoperative, even within the limited framework of this world).

Hashem knew that we couldn’t make it through the projected 6,000 years of olam hazeh without some access to this great light. He therefore pours down from above an illumination of this great revelation of Godliness every year on Yom Kippur. Of course, relative to the Source from which it comes, this is just a little hint of the great light of Olam Haba that Hashem wishes to reveal in the future. It is thus up to us to maximize its power by our own teshuvah. In this way, our awakening-from-below becomes the motivation for the great awakening-from-above that He withholds and makes dependent upon us. In other words, in this way we do something to become worthy of the great light that He has in store for us.

The Sefirotic Tree

The source for this amazing idea is the Kabbalah—specifically the Kabbalah of the Ari (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, 1535-1572) as expressed through the four main schools of thought that emanate from the Ari: the school of the Baal Shem Tov (Rabbi Yisrael ben Eliezer, 1698-1760), the school of the Rashash (Rabbi Sar Shalom Sharabi, 1702-1777), the school of the Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chayim Luzzatto, 1707-1747), and the school of the Gra (Rabbi Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman, aka the Gaon of Vilna, 1720-1798). Like the four tributaries that flowed forth from Eden’s river (Genesis 2:10-14), these four masters (and
the schools of thought that they founded) are together considered the main four tributaries that flow from the Ari (whose teachings flow from all the great masters who preceded him).\(^5^5\)

In these teachings we are told that Hashem set up reality as a complex superstructure with many sublevels or systems-within-systems. The revelation of Godliness at the highest levels of this superstructure is so great that our souls are/were subsumed in Hashem’s Infiniteness with no possibility of separate existence.

He thus created the lower subsystems in order to constrict and limit the great light of *Ein Sof*, to create a lower dimension within which our souls (which are rooted high above this physical world) could descend and earn the great delight of *Olam Haba* through our own efforts.

For the sake of simplicity, let us use the traditional schemata of the Sefirotic Tree of Life to represent this superstructure. The chart below depicts the ten *sefirot* divided into an upper triangle (containing the three highest *sefirot*) and a lower triangle (containing the seven lower *sefirot*).\(^5^6\)

Note that the highest *sefirah* (*Keter*) is the largest. Below *Keter*, on the right and on the left, are two smaller spheres, *Chokhmah* and *Binah*. These three higher *sefirot*, all within the upper triangle, represent the head of the superstructure, the level of *Olam Haba*.

The lower triangle represents the body of this superstructure, the level of *olam hazeh*. At the upper extremity of the lower triangle is a second set of three *sefirot*, *Chesed* to the right (beneath *Chokhmah*), *Gevurah* to the left (beneath *Binah*), and *Tiferet* (in the middle, beneath *Keter*).

Below this, is another set of three *sefirot*, *Netzach* to the right (beneath *Chesed* and *Chokhmah*), *Hod* to the left (beneath *Gevurah* and *Binah*), and *Yesod* in the center column (beneath *Keter* and *Tiferet*). At the very bottom is *Malkhut* (in the middle column, beneath *Yesod*, *Tiferet*, and *Keter*).

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\(^5^5\) In terms of the three coordinates of the *Sefer Yetzirah*, Rashash embodies the quantum physics aspect of the Ari’s teachings (*olam*-spacetime). Ramchal and Gra embody the meta-historical aspect (*shanah*-time, history). Baal Shem Tov embodies the soul aspect (*nefesh*, consciousness). Certainly all these aspects were/are included in the original teachings of the Ari (which themselves root up and back to the Supernal Torah that precedes creation). Nevertheless, each master embodies and emphasizes the aspect that he was drawn to develop in his unique way. In addition, each one also includes all the others from his particular perspective. We thus have a perfect combination of unity in diversity, and diversity in unity.

The specific aspects of the Ari’s teachings that these masters embody can also be defined in terms of the *sefirot*: Ari (*Keter*, which is the *Malkhut* of all who preceded him), Rashash (*Chokhmah*), Ramchal (*Binah*), Gra (*Tiferet*), Baal Shem Tov (*Malkhut*). And finally, the same relationships hold in terms of the five levels of Torah exegesis: Ari (*Razin d’Razin*, mysteries of mysteries), Rashash (*pshat*, simple), Ramchal (*remez*, allusion, allegory, metaphor), Gra (*derashah*, exposition), Baal Shem Tov (*sod*, mystery). Again, the teachings of each include aspects of all the others, embodying the idea of transcendent unity manifesting through diversity, and manifest diversity grounded or rooted in transcendent unity. More splintered than ever before (in every area of life), our generation needs to recognize and embrace this unity in diversity. I am beholden to Rabbi Moshe Schatz shlita for clarifying this important idea.

\(^5^6\) The specific colors that we assign to the *sefirot* are somewhat arbitrary. As Ramak (Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, 1522-1570) writes, “Color is something physical, whereas the *sefirot* are spiritual and cannot be described with physical properties...[such that] these colors allude to the results that are transmitted from the highest roots [as opposed to the *sefirot* themselves]...The colors are thus used allegorically to allude to the functions and results of the *sefirot*” (*Pardes Rimonin, Shaar HaGvanim*, Chapter 1, p. 59a; see also Kaplan, *Meditation and Kabbalah*, p. 181).
Days of Awe—Atonement

THE TEN SEFIROT

- **YKVK** (Havayah)
- **Olam Haba** (World to Come)
  - **Hanhagat HaYichud** (Mode of Unity)
- **Hanhagat HaAhavah** (Mode of Love)
  Bestowing love unconditionally Irrespective of our deeds

- Binah
  - Understanding
  - Gates of Binah
  - Yeziat Mitzrayim
  - Teshuvah preceded the world
  - Purim, Yom HaKippurim
  - Shemorah, Neshamah, HaShe'em

- Chokhmah - Wisdom

- Chesed
  - Loving-kindness, Giving

- Gevurah
  - Severity, Restraint

- Tiferet
  - Harmony, Truth

- Hod
  - Empathy, Majesty

- Netzach
  - Dominance, Victory

- Yesod
  - Connection, Foundation

- Malkhut
  - Kingdom

- Elokim
  - Olam Hazeh (this world)

- Hanhagat HaMishpat (Mode of Justice)
- School of accountability Measure for measure
Note that the circles or spheres become smaller at each successive stage. This illustrates the fact that the lower sefirot are more constricted (vis-à-vis the higher sefirot) in their ability to act as conduits to shine the light of Ein Sof down below. Their job is to filter the light in order to create a world in which what we do has significance, in which what we do has consequences, in which what we do makes a difference.

Note also the arrows at the lower left and right corners of the upper triangle. These arrows flow into the lower triangle as dotted lines that become the inner lining of the lower triangle. The relationship between the upper and lower triangles can be described as that of a hand in a glove. What we see with our eyes is the glove, but we must know that there is a hand behind it.

In terms of the different modes of Hashem's relationship with us, the upper triangle is complete mercy and love (above and beyond anything we deserve), whereas the lower triangle represents justice (measure-for-measure). This is the meaning of the two sets of key words that characterize the upper and lower triangles, respectively.

For instance, next to the upper triangle is the name Havayah (YKVK), the divine name that embodies Hashem's attribute of unconditional love and overriding mercy. Below that, is the term Olam Haba followed by two terms coined by the Ramchal, Hanhtagat HaYichud (Mode of Unity) and Hanhtagat HaAhavah (Mode of Love).

Both terms indicate an exalted level of divine providence through which Hashem brings His plan for creation to fruition for the sake of the revelation of His oneness and His love, irrespective of Israel's worthiness, as numerous verses attest: "For My sake, for My sake I will act [to bring the ultimate redemption], for how can I [let My Name] be profaned?!" (Isaiah 48:14), and "It is I, I, Who wipe away your transgressions, for My sake" (Isaiah 43:25). This is also the idea behind such prayers in which we ask, "Our Father, our King, act for Your sake if not for ours!" "Redeem us quickly for the sake of Your Name." It is the same idea behind our affirmation, "He will surely bring a redeemer to their children's children for the sake of His Name, with love."

Below Hanhtagat HaYichud and Hanhtagat HaAhavah, we have Bestowing love unconditionally, which means beyond or irrespective of our deeds (in Hebrew, le'maalah min ha'maasim). This refers again to the fact that, at this exalted level, Hashem does not judge the world by our actions, but rather brings about His ultimate plan that, although it will manifest "last in deed," was nevertheless "first in thought" in God's Mind, so to speak, before the world ever existed.

Alongside the lower triangle is a parallel set of terms: Elokim is the divine name that embodies God's attribute of justice. For the most part, we experience God as Elokim, the One who judges us and relates to us according to our actions, with His attribute of fair justice which requires that we deserve what He gives us.

The next term is Olam Hazeh (this world), followed by Hanhtagat HaMispat (Mode of Justice), School of Accountability and Measure for measure (midah keneged midah).

The six main sefirot of the lower triangle basically represent the submodes of providence that have characterized the 6,000 years of history since Adam. Chesed (the highest of the lower triangle) corresponds to the first millennium, Gevurah to the second, Tiferet to the third, Netzach to the fourth, Hod to the fifth, and Yesod to the sixth.
As opposed to being lower than the six, however, Malkhut (corresponding to the seventh millennium) represents the dawn of the Great Shabbat, the return to Gan Eden on a higher level, the beginning of the full revelation of the light of Olam Haba. In kabbalistic terminology, the seventh millennium will be that time-above-time when Malkhut (the lower mother) will be elevated back to its source in Binah (the upper mother). In the eighth millennium the light of Ein Sof will shine through Binah, no longer clothed (limited and constricted) in the subsystems of the lower seven sefirot. In the ninth millennium the light of Ein Sof will shine through Chokhmah, no longer clothed within Binah. In the tenth millennium the light of Ein Sof will finally shine through Keter, no longer clothed within any of the lower sefirot.\(^{57}\)

**Zohar Emor**

The following amazing text from the Zohar is about the service of the Cohen Gadol in the Holy of Holies, on Yom Kippur. First, let’s remember the three coordinates of the Sefer Yetzirah: olam (world)—space, shanah (year)—time, and nefesh (soul)—consciousness.

Just as the Cohen Gadol (the holiness of consciousness) entered the Holy of Holies (the holiness of space) on Yom Kippur (the holiness of time), so too can we enter the holy of holies of our being on this amazing day, when eternity literally breaks into time.\(^{58}\)

On this day (Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement and Forgiveness), the Cohen Gadol is crowned with supernal crowns [i.e., attains an exalted rung of holiness], and is thereby able to stand [as a representative and a conduit] between all that is above and all that is below. [By virtue of his service] he obtains atonement for himself, for his household, for the other Cohanim, for the Mikdash, and for all Israel.

We have learned that when the Cohen Gadol entered the Kodesh Kodashim with the blood of the bull, he would intend [to bind his thought] onto the reisha d’mehemnuta [the highest faith, or the head of faith, i.e., the head of the tree of life, Keter-Chokhmah-Binah, which transcends the law of cause and effect that demands that we deserve the goodness that HaShem wants to give us]. He would then sprinkle it [the blood of the bull] with his finger, as it is written, “He shall sprinkle with his forefinger, [once on the floor] nearest the eastern face of the Ark-cover; then, [aiming further away each time from] before the Ark-cover, he should continue sprinkling [on the floor] from the same blood seven additional times with his forefinger” (Leviticus 16:14).

How did he do this? He dipped the tip of his finger into the blood, and then sprinkled one drop at a time toward the Ark-cover ke’matzlif [in such a way that the first drop fell on the floor close to, and directly in front of, the Ark; the second drop fell just below the first drop; the third drop fell just below the second drop, etc., each time coming closer to where he stood]. He sprinkled and intended [focused his thought on the reisha d’mehemnuta], and began to count: “Achat, achat ve’achat—one, one and one.”

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\(^{57}\) For the sources and a more detailed explanation of these ideas, see “Visions of the Future” in two of my books, Purim Light (pp. 127-140), and Well of Living Waters (pp. 247-253).

\(^{58}\) Zohar Emor, 3:102a.
Achat—one, this is [Keter] the singular one, the one that includes all [i.e., Keter includes all the other sefirot in itself in a state of total oneness]; the one that is most praised of all; the one to which all turn and face, and into which they all return; the one that is the reisha (head of all).

Following this, "achat ve’achat—one and one"; these two [Chokhmah/Abba and Binah/Imma] always dwell together, with reuta (desire) and achvah (loving oneness), and never part from one another.

After reaching this ve’achat [Binah] which is the Imma/Mother of all, he begins counting be’zivuga [he unites/pairs Binah with each of the seven lower sefirot which are considered her children]. He counts and he says: "Achat u’shtayim—one and two" [i.e., he intends to unite Binah with Chesed and Gevurah], "achat ve’shalosh—one and three" [Binah with Tiferet], "achat ve’arba—one and four" [Binah with Netzach], "achat ve’chashe’mes—one and five" [Binah with Hod], "achat ve’shesha—one and six" [Binah with Yesod], "achat ve’sheva—one and seven" [Binah with Malkhut].

In this way, he intends to draw down and bring this ve’achat [the hidden level of Binah] which is the Supernal Imma/Mother, into the levels which are known [revealed], and then to draw light from all of them] into the crown of the Lower Imma [Malkhut, Shekhinah], that is, to draw deep rivers [of enlightenment] from their places [above] to Knesset Yisrael [to the Shekhinah, and by extension, to the congregation of Israel below].
Finally, of course, after we have earned the great light of Olam Haba—we will realize that even this ability to earn was Hashem’s gift to us. We will be like Moshe, who said, when he prayed to enter the Land, “Vaet’chanan el Hashem ba’et ha’hee—and I pleaded with Hashem at that time” (Deuteronomy 3:23). Rashi comments:

Chinun (grace), the root of the word vaet’chanan, is related to the concept of matnat chinam (a free gift). [This teaches us that] although the tzadikim could base their requests on their good deeds, they do not do so, but rather beg Hashem to be gracious with them and give them what they are asking as a free gift [irrespective of anything they have done to deserve it].

Some day (why not now?) we will be like the tzadikim, for we will understand the great kindness Hashem did for us by creating this world in such a way that we would have to be accountable for our actions. Earth, in this sense, is a school, a school of accountability. It is a school wherein we learn to be responsible, not to make excuses but rather to be proactive, to use the incredible gift of free will to grow, develop, and become truly free of all illusion. And even when we make mistakes (who doesn’t make mistakes?) to come clean, to be accountable.

We will understand why this world is so hard. We will realize that our main work here is teshuvah. Hashem literally creates difficult conditions for our benefit so that we can know how vulnerable and how very human we are. In many cases, if we are honest, we are not going to like what we see. But don’t give up. It is all to help us. It is to force us to clean ourselves. Our teshuvah is vital. Teshuvah from the depths, asking Hashem to help us, to clear us, to cleanse us. We know that on our own, we are incapable of of doing it ourselves.

This is the level of Keter. It isn’t a putdown. It isn’t Hashem lording it over us from the outside and saying, “I told you that you couldn’t do it without Me.” No, it is the opposite. Hashem is whispering to us, “Don’t you see? Don’t you see that the whole point of having to earn, of having to be responsible and accountable, is so that when I will finally give you what I have yearned for so long to give you, you will not misuse it? Don’t you see that it was all for you?”

Who are the ones we need to pity? The poor ones who will try to hide from the truth, who will try to act as if they are in control. They are only fooling themselves. It takes courage to admit that we have been wrong; that we have made mistakes—not just isolated mistakes, but that we have lived our whole lives in an illusion. It takes courage to let down the façade; to stop trying to save face and pretend we are something.

What is being asked of us? Humility. We are not in charge.
Chapter 6

Hashem’s Names

Transcendence and Immanence

Our experience and perception of God involves a number of basic paradoxes which are built into the mega-system of creation. What we must know is that these paradoxes exist only from our point of view and experience, from the point of view of the system itself.

For instance, on the one hand we see God as absolutely transcendent and distant. On the other hand, we see Him as immanent and close. The first leads us to contemplate how the entire universe is nothing in comparison to the infiniteness of the One who created it. The second allows us to perceive Hashem’s providential concern for everything in the universe down to the tiniest detail of our lives.

This apparent dichotomy is reflected in the correlation between the Four-Letter Name of God, יקוק (Havayah), which refers to His transcendence, and the Names Elokim or Adonai which refer to His immanence and mastery over nature.

The reason we experience transcendence and immanence as dichotomous is because we cannot understand how both states can be true at the same time. From God’s point of view, on the other hand, it is all one. He is simply not subject to the law of opposites that characterizes everything in His creation. God transcends the highest heavens. Heaven and earth, like distance and closeness, have nothing to do with Him. They are only categories which He created especially for us, so that we can exist, experience Him, and know something of the Infinite Being about whom nothing can be said or thought.

However we define these terms, the point is that the two modes are ONE. The first is like a king hidden away in his palace; the other is like the same king standing next to us, disguised as a pauper. Aren’t these two really one? Isn’t it the same king? Yes! And in a way it is the second mode that is even deeper. How awesome it is that the Infinite One hides in our very midst, and we don’t see Him!

Revelation and Concealment

The Divine Name יקוק embodies God’s attribute of unconditional love and overriding mercy, while the Name Elokim embodies God’s attribute of justice, which requires that we deserve what He gives us.

In other words, as much as He wants to (and eventually will) allow us to partake of His infinite goodness, He constrains and withholds this desire, and makes our ability to receive dependent upon our actions. The order of magnitude changes from something so great that there aren’t enough numbers to express it, to something seemingly so miniscule as to be absurd.

This is the conceptual meaning behind the idea of the tzimtzum (contraction) of God’s infinite light in order to create a space for the world to exist. In truth this tzimtzum is more of a concealment than a literal contraction or withdrawal. God is here, there, and
everywhere just as He was before the tzimtzum. The only difference is that He performed perhaps the most difficult feat an Infinite Being could perform: He hid Himself.

Just think, if we were the size of a trillion trillion trillion trillion galaxies, where could you hide? It’s hard to conceptualize this, but He is hiding right next to us.

Hiddenness is thus the basic condition for what we call olam hazeh (this-world). In Olam Haba (the World-to-Come) God will begin to reverse this process. When He turns up the power just a tiny bit, we will realize that there never was anything but His existence. At that time, however, as a result of our having seen through the disguise of His concealment in olam hazeh, we will not only be able to continue to exist in Olam Haba but we will exist in the full presence of God’s infinite light in a way that we cannot even imagine.

In the meantime, for the most part we experience God as Elokim, the One who withholds His light and makes its revelation conditional on what we do. In essence the name Elokim is like a garment or a measuring cup for God's mercies. Elokim says, "Only so much, and no more." When God dresses up in this name, He is said to judge us, interact with us, and relate to us in accord with our actions, according to His attribute of fair justice which requires that we deserve what He gives us. Why?

As we saw above, the answer involves the idea that Hashem is our Divine Parent. Just as parents want their children to thrive and to grow into mature, responsible adults, so does God want us to grow into mature and responsible souls. As our Heavenly Parent, His desire is to bestow upon us, His children, the greatest possible good. In order to insure that we will be worthy of receiving the ultimate good that He wishes to give us (and that we will be able to enjoy it to the fullest), He sent our souls down into this-world where we would have to struggle to attain our own perfection, and thereby acquire our own Eternity. This is the hiding of the Face (or the diminishing of the revelation of His Presence) that characterizes this physical world.

God’s hiding and judging us by our actions thus means the opposite of what many people think. Far from being angry with us or mean, the opposite is true: He very much cares about us and how we use our free will. We can exist as autonomous beings with free will only because He hides. By hiding, He creates the possibility for us to have a genuine relationship with an other. If He would not hide, there could be no semblance of an "other." By making His interaction with us conditional on what we pray, think, say and do, He shows that He cares about what we pray, think, say, and do.

Therefore, if anyone ever asks you: Why is the existence of this lower physical world predicated on such intense hiding and judging? You can answer: Only thus can what we do make a difference. Only thus does God give ultimate meaning to human action. God’s judging us and holding us accountable means that He cares how we use our free will. Out of His love for us, His creatures, He cares about what we do.

If He were to interact with us only on the basis of His overriding mercy, our actions would be meaningless. Only by constraining His mercy and making it dependent on our prayers, thoughts, intentions, speech, and actions, does He give meaning to human life. However, His love for us is not dependent upon what we do. It transcends and overrides what we do. Because of this we can call out to Him to save us when we are bogged down and cannot extricate ourselves from our mistakes. His mercies are truly never exhausted.
King David wrote:

יהִי חוֹסֵךְ חַסְדְּךָ יְהוָה עָלֵינוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר יִחַלְנוּ לָךְ

Hashem, may Your lovingkindness be [focused or flow down] upon us to the degree that we yearn/hope for You! (Psalm 33:22).

Doesn’t it make sense that the more we become aware of His hidden Presence, the more revealed that Presence will be in our lives? It depends on us, on our desire to awaken, to yearn to become aware of the reality that our souls know so well.

According to the Talmud, the right hand is to be used to draw near and the left hand to push away. On the level of the divine, the right represents God’s love towards us and His desire to lift us up above our present limitations and draw us near to Him. The left represents the quality of divine justice which requires that we be worthy of receiving this elevation. Although both of these relationships are necessary, the quality of love and goodness is immeasurably stronger. The right hand of love is thus always in ascendancy over the left. In essence, this means that we do not turn to God on the basis of our worthiness, but with humility, and ask that He pour His love over us. We then ask that we be given the vessels with which to receive this love.

If we could only clear the bonds of sleep from our eyes, we would sense the hidden hand right now in the accelerated pace of our individual and collective lives. We would know that the judgment we have felt is not intended to hurt us, but to build us, and that the left hand that pushed us away is flanked by a right hand that draws us even closer.

God loves us. It is not an illusion. He is taking care of us. When we accept this, even the external events of our lives can no longer camouflage His presence. We begin to sense it everywhere. Nothing happens solely by chance. History is where man meets God. Divine providence is the hidden hand that guides all events towards a secret rendezvous with Him.

This is alluded to in a verse in the Book of Proverbs:

טוֹבָה תּוֹכַחַת מְגֻלָּה מְסֻתָּרֶת מְאָהָבָה מָאָה בִּֽסֵתַרָה

O how good/sweet is revealed rebuke/correction [when we realize that it flows] from the deepest hidden love (Proverbs 27:5).

Justice does not contradict love and mercy. When we pray that Hashem’s mercy overcome and dominate over His attributes, i.e., His judgment and justice, we are just asking to be able to see His mercy behind the justice. We are asking to see that the entire system of justice that God has established in order to run His world flows from the deepest love.

The Binding of Isaac

On the second day of Rosh Hashanah we read in the Torah the Akedat Yitzchak (Binding of Isaac), wherein Avraham almost sacrificed Yitzchak, but stopped when Hashem commanded him to desist. In our morning prayers, immediately following Akedat Yitzchak, we say the following prayer:

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59 Sotah 47a.
60 Yoma 76a.
In obedience to Hashem’s command to take his son to Mount Moriah and to “raise him up there as an olah” (which has the double meaning of burnt-offering and elevation-offering), Avraham overcame the natural compassion he had for his beloved son and was willing, however mistakenly, to sacrifice him. When he arrived at Mount Moriah, the future site of the Beit HaMikdash (Temple), he bound his beloved Yitzchak, placed him on the stone altar, and was about to place the knife on his throat, when Hashem ordered him to stop: “Al tishlach yadkha el hanaar—do not stretch your hand forth against the lad! Ve’al taass lo meumah—do not do anything to him!” (Genesis 22:12).

Why did he have to use two expressions? Because as much as Avraham had struggled with himself to overcome his natural fatherly compassion, now, after completely internalizing the divine command, in the midst of carrying it out, he had to be forcefully commanded to stop. As Rashi explains, “Do not stretch your hand forth against the lad [to slay him].” But Avraham countered, “If so, for naught I have come this far. Let me at least wound him by drawing forth a little blood!” To this, Hashem replied, “No! Al taass lo meumah—do not do anything to him! Al taass lo mum—do not even wound him.”

In the merit of Avraham’s suppressing and overcoming something so natural as his own sense of fatherly compassion, we ask Hashem to completely waive any judgments against us, even if we are totally guilty. We ask that His attribute of *chesed* (love) and *rachamim* (compassion) (His desire to bestow love and goodness unconditionally and irrespective of our deserving it) overcome His *din* (judgment) (His desire that we deserve the goodness that He wishes to give us).

But this is more than Hashem’s *chesed* overcoming His *gevurah*. It is rather His *Atik Yomin*-Keter (His overriding will and purpose for creating us which is complete unmitigated mercy) overcoming His *Zeir Anpin*-Tiferet (the mode of providence through which He interacts with us based on our actions).

In the language of *Partzufim*, the supernal mode of *Keter* is called *Atik Yomin* (Ancient of Days) and *Arikh Anpin* (Long Face, Infinitely Patient), whereas the mode of *Tiferet* is called *Zeir Anpin* (Small or Diminished Face) to indicate less mercy and a greater admixture of din-judgment. In the *Siddur HaRashash*, the prayer that precedes the Akedah contains the following additions in small print:

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**Master of the universe! Just as our father Avraham overcame his compassion in order to wholeheartedly fulfill Your will, so may Your mercy [the mercy of *Atik Yomin* which is complete mercy] overcome Your anger [the anger of *Zeir Anpin* which is an admixture of mercy and judgment], and may Your mercy [the infinitely patient mercy of *Arikh Anpin*] prevail over Your attributes [the short-tempered attributes of *Zeir Anpin*]. Hashem our God! Interact/relate with us with**
lovingkindness and with compassion. Do not judge us solely according to the requirements of strict justice.

The mode of Zeir Anpin is also called skhar ve’onesh (reward and punishment), midah-keneged-midah (measure for measure, action-reaction), and hanhagat hamishpat (divine justice or the system of accountability). This mode of providence is definitely not automatic; it does not run on its own and it is not mechanical!

Rather in the mode of Zeir Anpin, Hashem diminishes His light for the express purpose of allowing man to act as a autonomous being. If the light were too strong, man would be overwhelmed. He would become a robot. In order to create a real relationship, Hashem withholds the full revelation of His existence. He pulls back His Ein Sof light, and reserves it for the future when man, as a result of having refined himself by the right use of his free will, will be able to handle it.

As we have seen, even this din (judgment) is a great kindness and mercy.
Chapter 7

Viduy

We beseech You, Hashem our God and God of our ancestors! Let our prayers come before You. Our King, do not ignore our supplications, for, Hashem our God and God of our ancestors, we are not so arrogant and stiff-necked as to think that we are completely righteous and have not erred. On the contrary [we want to admit to You and to ourselves that] we have erred (chet), and we have sinned intentionally in order to satisfy our lust (avon), and we have rebelliously committed crimes which have caused us to become coarse and insensitive, and therefore unworthy of Your forgiveness (pesha). This goes for us, our parents, and the members of our families [whether now or in previous lifetimes].

Ashamnu—we plead guilty [no excuses; no attempt to evade consequences; we feel that we have become spiritually desolate and empty]. Bagadnu—we have been ungrateful [lack of appreciation for all the good we have; even repaid bad and empty]. GAZAINU—we have robbed [taken forcibly what is not ours]. DIBARNU DOFI velashon hara—we have acted two-faced and slandered [thinking one thing but saying another; acting friendly to our fellow's face but speaking slander and hating him behind his back]. He’vevinu—we have caused others to deviate [misled; distorted and bent what is right]. Vehirshanu—we have led others to deviate [no excuses; no attempt to evade consequences; we feel that we have become spiritually desolate and empty].
wickedly [we have convinced others that they are good, have no hope].

62 Zadnu— we have acted maliciously [willfully committed serious offenses with malicious intent]. Chamasnu— we have coerced [and intimidated others to give or even sell us something of theirs against their will].

63 Tafalnu sheker umirmah— we have falsely accused and deceived [we framed lies, libeled, maligned, slandered, and implicated others in order to save our own necks].

64 Ya'atznu ra— we have given bad advice [advised others to do things harmful to themselves, and thereby caused them to stumble and sin, all in order to gain at their expense].

Kizavnu— we have spoken falsely [and deceptively, and even sworn and promised, knowing full-well that we(3,6),(998,995) had no intention of keeping our word]. Kichashnu— we have denied [we have suppressed and denied the truth].

Kaasnu— we have let our word get the best of us. Latznu— we have mocked others [made light of Torah’s teachings and of other serious matters].

Maradnu— we have rebelled [we rebelled against HaShem’s laws; thrown off the yoke of the commandments; lacked faith in HaShem]. Marinu devareikha— we have exchanged [i.e., compromised] Your truth [for our own convenience].

Niatznu— we have provoked [we contemptuously angered Hashem by following after our own lusts, provoking His displeasure].

Ni'afnu— we have committed adultery [and other sexual offenses]. Sararnu— we have acted stubbornly [and obstinately turned our hearts away from serving Hashem, from doing what is right].

Avinu— we have transgressed [we committed transgressions purposely in order to satisfy our lust; and then got caught in a web of our own rationalizations].

Pashaanu— we have committed crimes [thrown off the yoke of the Torah and its commandments; became coarse and insensitive and therefore unworthy of Hashem’s forgiveness].

Pagamnu— we have caused damage [we have damaged the very things which are most sacred and precious to us].

Tzararnu— we have oppressed [and harassed others].

Tsiarunu av ve'em— we have caused our parents grief and anguish. Kishinu oref— we have been stiffnecked [and obstinate; ignored all reminders to repent; considered all events random, thereby denying divine providence].

Rashaanu— we have acted wickedly [and became twisted inside].

Shichatnu— we have acted perversely [decadent immorality, adultery, and idolatry, all covered over and justified by fabricating false ideologies; the result: corruption and perversion of innate sense of right and wrong].

Ty'mnu— we have committed abominations [we have lost human dignity; stooped to the level of being an animal].

Ta'nu— we have strayed from truth [we admit that we have completely gone astray; lost our way in life].

65 Ti'ataanu— we have misled others [we purposely led others astray as well].

66 Hirshaanu— we have led others to act wickedly; [we have convinced others that they are good, have no hope], and Rashanu— wickedness [acted wickedly and became twisted inside].

What is the definition of rasha (resha'im, plural; rasha, singular), usually translated “evil” or “wicked” man? Look at the letter-structure of the word rasha: resh-shin-ayin. The first and last letters, resh and ayin, spell ra (evil). The shin in the center can be seen as an abbreviation of the word ish (man). The shin in rasha is the ish who is caught in ra. In this sense, the English term wicked is perfect for it carries the connotation of twistedness, as in the twisted wick of a candle. A wicked person is really someone who has become twisted and enmeshed in being wicked; i.e., he not only perpetrates wicked acts but has become twisted and wicked himself—or, as is true in the majority of cases, he thinks of himself as wicked, and it is this thought that holds him back from being able to return to his true Self. As above, the secret of Viduy is that we distinguish our Self from our actions...

67 Chamasnu— we have coerced [and intimidated others to give or even sell us something of theirs against their will].

In the Torah, the sin of Noach’s generation is described as, “Vatishchachet ha’aretz lifney HaElohim—the world became corrupted, decadent, perverted before God, vatimalley ha’aretz chamas—and the land was filled coercion, violence, cruelty, crime, robbery, kidnapping, immorality” (Genesis 6:11, Targum Yonathan, Targum Yerushalmi).

According to the Talmud (Sanhedrin 57a), vatishchachet (like shichatnu) includes all three cardinal sins: giluy arayot (immorality), avodat ellilim (idolatry), and shfikhut damim (manslaughter). Chizkeni brings three verses as proof that chamas also includes all three cardinal sins (Jeremiah 51:35, Ezekiel 8:17, Joel 4:19). King David prayed, “Reeh oyvay ki rabu—behold how my enemies have multiplied; vesinat chamas senuni—[behold] the unjustified, irrational hatred with which they hate me” (Psalm 25:19).

68 “Tafalu sheker zedim—wanton sinners have accused me falsely” (Psalm 119:69); “Ve’ulam atem tofley shaker— but you are all concoctors of falsehood” (Job 13:4); “Ve’tibpol al avoni—they have added sin to my sin” (Job 14:17), i.e., they have hypocritically imputed falsehood to me [of which they themselves are guilty]” (Hirsch, Psalm 119:69).
[In sum] we have turned away from Your good commandments and ethical laws—all to no avail. You are therefore justified with regard to any punishment that befalls us, for You have acted truthfully, while we have just hardened our hearts and become more enmeshed in our sins.

Teshuvah and Viduy

One of the most powerful concepts in the Torah is the concept of teshuvah. Teshuvah means return. It is often translated as repentance, for it includes the profound sense of remorse, sorrow, and genuine regret we feel after realizing that we have done wrong and want to make amends.

Teshuvah thus involves a conscious decision to dissociate ourselves from things that brought us low and precipitated our erring and losing our way. It also involves a desire to retrieve and reclaim our basic dignity as free-willed human beings not driven by our baser compulsions. Through teshuvah we return to our selves. We also return to our higher selves, to potentials within ourselves that we didn’t know existed. Indeed, through sincere teshuvah, we can attain an even higher level of closeness to Hashem than we had before we sinned.

The Torah gives critical importance to the concept of viduy in the teshuvah process. Viduy, usually translated confession, is from the reflexive verb form lehitvadot. It means, literally, to admit [the truth] to oneself. King David thus said:

כִּסִיתִי ,חַטָּאתִי אוֹדִיעֲ .וְאַתָּה נָשָׂאתָ עֲוֹן חַטָּאתִי סֶלָה ,’הי אוֹדֶה עֲלֵי פְשָׁעַי לַ אָמַרְתִּ  .וַעֲוֹנִי

[At last] I will make known my chet (error) to You, no longer concealing my avon (premeditated wrongdoing). I said: “Odeh (I will confess/admit) pesha’ay (my intentional crimes) to Hashem.” You then forgave the avon (premeditated wrongdoing) of my chet (error), selah (Psalm 32:5).

In other words, by admitting our wrongdoing to Hashem, He transmutes even a premeditated crime into an error.

According to the sages (especially Rambam, Hilkhot Teshuvah 1:1), in order to fulfill the Torah’s command to return in teshuvah (which is an inner decision), we must articulate to ourselves in words (not just in thought) what we have done wrong, regret having sinned, and resolve never to fall again. In a sense, viduy is the mechanism which allows us to attain perfect teshuvah. This is how it works:

We often feel that something is wrong with our lives. Perhaps we cannot put our finger on it, but something is definitely wrong. In modern terminology this could be called a free-floating anxiety-state. Our emotions are blocked and we are unable to function fully. Now, if someone suggests that we are suffering because we sinned, we will probably tell him to leave us alone. We might even show anger at such audacity. Although we may also go to synagogue and say tachanun about all the things we supposedly did wrong, this will have no effect. Why not? Because our inner lives are completely divorced from what we are saying. So what do we do?

First of all, we need to understand that we are born with tremendous energy to grow and accomplish. In Kabbalah, this energy is called nefesh. As we saw above in the parable of the blood cell, nefesh is the lowest extremity of our soul, the aspect of the soul that interfaces with our physical body. We are also born with a powerful ratzon—desire to know who we are, and to establish our own unique identity based on that deep knowing. This desire is called
ruach. Finally, we are born with the potential for attaining closeness to the One who made us. This potential itself has three levels called neshamah, chayah, yechidah.

### The Five Levels of the Soul

From the highest level of the soul rooted in God’s oneness to the lowest aspect of the soul residing in the physical organism (specifically the blood), these five levels are called yechidah, chayah, neshamah, ruach, and nefesh.

In the Zohar, we read, "Come see. When a person is born, he is given the soul-level of nefesh...If he refines himself, he becomes worthy of receiving ruach...If he refines himself further, he becomes worthy of receiving neshamah...If he refines himself further..."  

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<th>5. yechidah</th>
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<td>4. chayah</td>
<td>life-force; collective soul</td>
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<td>3. neshamah</td>
<td>divine breath; supernal soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ruach</td>
<td>speaking or prophetic spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. nefesh</td>
<td>vital or indwelling soul</td>
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We see from the Zohar that the reason we are given nefesh is in order to refine it so that we will then be able to fully embody the higher aspects of our soul. The same is true of ruach and neshamah at successively more advanced levels. In this sense, it appears that our task is to scale the heights of the ladder of our soul from the bottom up. It must be kept in mind, however, that nothing happens down here without Hashem’s help via the higher rungs of the soul. Thus, though these higher rungs are extremely hidden at first and seemingly completely inaccessible, they are nevertheless very much present, guiding us and assisting us throughout our entire lives.

Rabbi Shlomo Elyashiv (1841-1926), one of the greatest masters of Kabbalah of his time, describes this dynamic from the point of view of the neshamah, that is, from the top down:

While the essence of the neshamah remains above, it beams a projection of itself down below into the body. This projection enters into the body level, and serves there as its [indwelling] soul. It is then—via that beam of its own light that the soul projects—that the body draws its life-force and its existence from above, for as long as this is decreed.

Now from its position above [but via its projection within the body], the neshamah constantly works on the body. Not for a single moment does the neshamah leave the body without activity [but rather it pushes and compels it to grow and develop to its full

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65 Zohar Mishpatim, 2:94b.
66 The Gaon of Vilna thus wrote, "In man, the level of neshamah is exceedingly hidden [corresponding to the super-conscious]. Man’s essential life-force is concentrated in his ruach [corresponding to the conscious mind]. The ruach [which is psychologically equivalent to the need to know oneself, the need to forge and acquire a unique identity] is the person himself, the one who is empowered [when he rises up to his higher calling by not only doing good but by being good, internalizing good], the one who is weakened [when he fails to rise to the occasion]; the one who feels, the one who possesses all the necessary soul-powers [to become himself] and all the necessary senses. The neshamah, on the other hand, is the higher sekhel [consciousness or intellect or intuition] that teaches and guides a person and bestows daat [self-awareness]. It is one’s mazal, and one’s guardian angel. This neshamah is above in heaven [as well as above in the higher stratospheres of consciousness], but it sparkles its light down to guide a person and enlighten him. The neshamah is therefore considered the heavenly aspect of the soul relative to the person himself which begins with ruach [and includes nefesh, the subconscious]" (Gaon of Vilna, commentary to Sefer Yetzirah 1:1 ofan gimel; see Nefesh HaChayim 1:15 end; Rabbi Shlomo Elyashiv, Leshem, Hakdamot VeShearim, Shaar Gimel, perek beit (end), p. 18).
67 Leshem, Hakdamot VeShearim, Shaar Beit, perek beit (end), p. 16.
potential]. For the neshamah’s job is to rectify its junior physical counterpart below, so that it may eventually return it to itself above.

Malbim describes this process of refinement and rectification in his commentary to the Song of Songs. In Song of Songs (8:8-10), the neshamah says to God, “We have a little sister, and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister on the day she shall be spoken for?” God answers: “If only she be [found strong in her faith like] a wall, we shall build a castle of true yearning and aspiration upon her. But if she be [vacillating like] a door, we will enclose her [grave] with cedar.” Finally, the little sister herself speaks up and says: “I am a wall [persevering in my faith], and my breasts are like strong towers. [Since my only desire is to serve Him forever after] may I be found worthy in His eyes of eternal peace!” Malbim elucidates:

The neshamah speaks to God: “We have a little sister.” The neshamah’s sister, the lowest aspect of the soul that descends from heaven, is the nefesh. This nefesh is bound to the body [in the sense that it comes into existence when the neshamah enters the body]. This being the case, it is not eternal by nature [but bound to physical existence in time and space] and would naturally “go down to the grave” [i.e., cease to exist] along with the body.

Nevertheless, the neshamah can subject this nefesh to a kind of alchemical process of self-transformation. Through the intense study of Torah and the performance of its commandments, it can refine the nefesh by elevating the personality and body above the level of base instinct and pure egocentricity. The nefesh can then ascend with the neshamah at the moment of death.

The neshamah therefore speaks before the Holy One saying: “We [the body and I] have a little sister [who was born when we came together], but she has no breasts. That is, she still does not have the power to bestow [perfection], only to receive it. What then shall we do with our sister on the day that she will be spoken for, that is, on the day the body dies and is buried in the ground? How can I be sure that the very reason I descended to this world [the transformation of the physical into an eternal spiritual identity] not be for naught?!”

God answers: “If the nefesh has become like a fortified wall, if, that is, it has internalized the neshamah’s directives, and overcome the temptations of the yetzer [urge or inclination to physicality], ‘we shall build a castle of khesef for her’ (ibid. 8:9)—we will bring her to Gan Eden and raise her to heights to which the righteous truly yearned (nikhsefu). If, on the other hand, the nefesh has been like a door, opening herself to the wiles of the yetzer, ‘we shall enclose her [grave] with cedar’ and she will decompose along with the body.”

At this point, the nefesh itself can hold back no longer and says, “I am a wall and my breasts are like strong towers! [Since my only desire is to serve Him forever after] may I be found worthy in His eyes of eternal peace!”

We gain an even deeper insight into this dynamic of refinement and rectification from one of the great Chasidic masters, Rabbi Chayim of Tchernovitch. In his classic Siduro Shel Shabbat, he writes.\(^\text{68}\)

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\(^{68}\) Siduro Shel Shabbat, 2nd Root, 2nd Branch, 1st Leaf, p. 24a.
As is known, there are five levels/aspects to man’s soul—[from the bottom up:] nefesh, ruach, neshamah, chayah, and yechidah. Together with the guf-body, there are a total of six levels, which themselves divide evenly into two groups of three [guf-nefesh-ruach; neshamah-chayah-yechidah].

For guf, nefesh, and ruach are all considered “knowers of good and evil,” in the sense that they can always switch from good to bad and from bad to good [i.e., from desiring what is good and beneficial to the soul, to desiring what is detrimental, and vice versa]. When, on the other hand, the nefesh and ruach are drawn after the [higher aspects of the soul, namely] neshamah, chayah, and yechidah, they [and the body they inhabit] can become a “throne” for those higher levels, as the Zohar teaches:

The initial awakening-from-below must come from the nefesh. [It must be the one to arouse and refine the guf, to bring it into the service of the Blessed Creator], for it is closest to the guf...After one has rectified this level [of nefesh], it becomes a “throne” for the ruach to dwell/nest upon it. This is accomplished by virtue of the nefesh arousing the guf to which it is bound [to perform mitzvot, to pray, to bless, and to be involved in Torah, as is fitting]. It is thus written, “Until ruach is poured down upon us from above” (Isaiah 32:15) [meaning, the nefesh awaits the moment when, in the merit of its having transformed the guf into a willing partner to serve the Creator, the light of ruach comes to fill it].

After both of them [nefesh and ruach] have been rectified, they are now ready to receive the level of neshamah...This neshamah is hidden [because it is a throne for chayah], and exalted-above-all [because of yechidah], and concealed-of-all-concealed [because of the Light of Ein Sof that flows through them and binds them].

The entire purpose of refining and purifying the nefesh and ruach is to raise up and elevate our guf, to raise all these levels up on high, to become bound to the lights of the highest aspects of our souls above, namely, neshamah, chayah, and yechidah.

The point of all these sources is clear: We are created to scale each and every rung of the ladders of our souls, from the bottom all the way up to the highest levels. But is this only some kind of distant ideal? How could it apply to people like us; people who grew up without knowing about any of this, and therefore almost inevitably used or misused our vital energies for the wrong things?

Making Distinctions
What about us? What happens when, whether due to our upbringing and/or through our own actions, this precious vital soul-energy gets either blocked or dissipated? Why is it that, by the time we are really ready to use it to grow and develop our greatest potential, this energy seems to have disappeared? Where is it?

In the majority of cases it is stuck in various mistaken attitudes, habits, compulsions, and hang-ups which we may know are detrimental but cannot seem to release. On the contrary, instead of improving ourselves and changing whatever needs to be changed, some of us tend to identify with our hang-ups and rationalize that we are really okay. We may even go so far as to defend those very things in ourselves which prevent us from growing and improving our relationships with others. We become so entangled in this mess that our whole inner life—or what is left of it—becomes one big escape from reality in which our vital energies have no chance to be channeled into anything worthwhile.

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69 Zohar Lekh Lekha, 1:83b.
energy is constantly dissipated in trying to justify what we do in order to feel okay. In other words, our ability to judge ourselves clearly and honestly becomes completely distorted. We become victims of cognitive dissonance—the mechanism which allows us to reject, avoid, and explain away any information which may contradict or upset our present self-image.

What we must do is retrieve the vital energy that was given to us when we were born—and to some extent is renewed every year, every month, every week, every morning, and even every moment. This is what teshuvah and viduy are all about. These are not merely “religious” rituals. They are the tools we were given by the Creator to reconnect to our higher self, and, at any point in our lives, do the work of inner transformation.

For instance, let’s say I spoke gruffly to someone I love, thus hurting his feelings. Do I defend my action with all kinds of excuses (thereby not only aggravating the situation with the other person, but hardening the personality klipah—shell by identifying with this kind of behavior)? Or can I admit to myself and to the other person that this was an inappropriate way to act (and that it does not represent the real me)? By defending, I enclose myself in a self-created cell or shell (or, more likely, reinforce the shell that has already been created by such actions in the past). By admitting that I acted inappropriately, I open up a pathway back to myself, to my real self.

It is in this sense that viduy is a self-cleaning mechanism designed to help us realign with who we really are as opposed to who we have become (or, more correctly, as opposed to the distorted way in which we have come to perceive and judge ourselves) as a result of specific negative behaviors. Viduy certainly involves taking responsibility for what we do, but not as a guilt-trip or self-condemnation that ends up reinforcing the negative self-image and the behavior it generates. On the contrary, viduy is meant to help us free ourselves from any compulsions in which we may have gotten stuck.

"We have been ungrateful for all the good done to us and even repaid bad for good"; "we let our anger get the best of us"; "we have committed adultery and other sexual offenses"; "we have lost our human dignity and stooped to the level of animals"; "we have completely gone astray and lost our way in life."

Every one of these statements involves a kind of stepping back motion. By saying "I acted in such-and-such a way," we automatically distinguish between our self and what we did. We regret and dissociate ourselves from what we did in order to realign ourselves with what we are.

This step is called akirat haratzon, uprooting the will with which we did something in order to reclaim that will for real growth (see below). Dissociating or disengaging from what we did wrong involves saying, "That is not me. If I knew then what I know now, I would never have done that. I am me; those actions are not me."

On our own, some of us find it difficult to be objective about what we have done. We seem to prefer to suffer with unproductive feelings of guilt, and, at the same time, rationalize that it wasn’t so bad after all, etc. The Torah comes to our rescue and says, "One who goes to great lengths to detail his viduy before Hashem is considered praiseworthy." This means that in articulating what we did wrong with words, we can use words to make distinctions instead of blanket statements, such as "I’m no good," or its opposite, "I’m fine" (thus living in denial and effectively disconnecting ourselves from how we really feel, all in order to save face, etc.). We can use words to recall details, to clarify what we are really feeling, to get

70 Rambam, Hilkhhot Teshuvah 1:1.
back in touch with who we really are. We can use words to speak to Hashem, to ask Him to heal us from old wounds, to free us from our own mechanisms, to accept us, to love us, to enlighten us, to bring us close to Him. Only then can we clean our systems and get on with what has to be done. Far from being just a "guilt-trip," the act of *viduy* is an owning up to what we have done and sincerely desiring to correct our past, learn from it and even be a better person than we could have been before.

**Akirat HaRatzon—Reclaiming our Will**

Rabbi Moshe Chayim Luzzatto wrote:

The idea that Hashem is a God of truth is embodied in the statement of Moshe our teacher, peace be upon him, "The Rock—His work is perfect, for all His ways are just. He is a faithful God, never unfair; righteous and [the source of all that is] moral is He" (Deuteronomy 32:4). Since the Holy One desires justice, ignoring the bad would be as much of an injustice as ignoring the good. If He desires justice, He must deal with each person in accord with his actions... with the minutest discrimination, for good or for bad...

This is the underlying meaning of the sages’ statement on the above verse: “He acts righteously and morally equally towards the righteous and the wicked.” For this is His attribute. He judges everything. He punishes for every wrongdoing. There is no escape.

And if you might ask, "Seeing that, whatever the case may be, everything must be subjected to judgment, what function does the attribute of mercy serve?” the answer is that the attribute of mercy is certainly the mainstay of the world, without which the world could not continue to exist. Nevertheless, the attribute of justice is not completely negated or abrogated. For on the basis of justice alone, it would be fitting (1) that the wrongdoer be punished for his act immediately and without delay; (2) that the punishment be a wrathful one, as befits one who rebels against the command of the Creator; and (3) that there be no correction whatsoever for the wrong done. For in truth, how can one straighten what has been made crooked, seeing that the damage has already been done? If a man killed his neighbor; if he committed adultery—how can he possibly correct this? Can he remove an accomplished fact from actuality?

However, it is with the power of God’s attribute of mercy that the above three factors can be reversed. Mercy provides that (1) the wrongdoer be given time, and not be wiped out the moment he sins; (2) that the punishment itself not involve destruction; and (3) that the gift of *teshuvah* (return, repentance) be given with complete unconditional love to those who have erred—so that the uprooting of the very will that prompted the deed be considered an uprooting of the deed itself.

That is, when the person who repents recognizes [the gravity of] his error, admits having done it, and furthermore reflects on the sinfulness of the offense, and completely regrets having committed such an act in the first place, similar to one who regrets having made a particular vow... and he desires and yearns that the act had never been done, and he feels great anguish in his heart over the fact that it was done, and he absolves never to do it again—this **uprooting of the act from his will** is considered like the uprooting of a vow, and he is granted atonement. This is the intention of the verse, “Your wrong will depart and your error will be atoned” (Isaiah 6:7). The wrong

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71 Ramchal, *Mesilat Yesharim*, Chapter 4, *Bederekh Knit HaZehirut*.
72 Yalkut Shimoni 2:942 on Deuteronomy 32:4.
actually departs and no longer exists; it is uprooted because of his suffering for and regretting now what had taken place in the past.

This is certainly a function of love (mercy), and not of justice. Nevertheless, it is not a love that entirely negates justice. On the contrary it can be seen as a love that accords with justice because, instead of the act of will from which the wrong arose and the pleasure that it afforded, there is now regret and [psychological] pain. So too, the time extension constitutes not a waiving of the offense but rather God’s patient forbearance with the sinner in order to give him a chance [literally open a door for him] to rectify what he has done.

[In all cases] these considerations do not completely negate justice, for there is sufficient reason [even according to the dictates of justice] to attach importance to them.

The remote possibility that the uprooting of the will that prompted a deed be considered an uprooting of the deed itself is revolutionary. It means that the past is not set in stone, and that a rectification in consciousness, although unable to change the objective reality of a crime that has been committed (such as murder or adultery), nevertheless has an effect. The question is how this works and how it is connected to the essence of teshuvah.

Judaism, especially Kabbalah, sees the ratzon-will as the highest and most powerful component of the human psycho-spiritual makeup. Above, we mentioned that we are given a basic energy when we are born, as well as every day of our lives—in diminishing proportions (unless we begin to utilize the energy properly, in which case we can receive increasing proportions). When this energy or soul-potential is misused, or if it is not used at all, it dissipates. The more a person becomes entangled in the downward process of spiritual deterioration, the more he severs himself from his very life-force while he is still alive—to the extent that a rasha (a wicked man, a man who has become enmeshed in his own wickedness) is called a dead man even while he is alive.73

Of course, this process is reversible. We must disentangle and reclaim our soul-potential for the good. Only then can we free our free will and thus free ourselves of any compulsions in which we may have gotten stuck. As above, we start by making a distinction between who we really are and what we have done. We dissociate ourselves from what we did in order to realign ourselves with what we are. We uproot the will that we used to do what we did, and reclaim that same will for real growth.

Tashlikh
The Ari taught about this reclamation of our misappropriated vital energy in the context of the Tashlikh ritual that we do every Rosh Hashanah. As is known, this ritual involves going to a body of water, preferably a natural body of water with live fish, etc. There, we recite three verses from the prophet Micah in which we enumerate the Yod-Gimel Midot HaRachamim (Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy). The verses thus read:

(1) Who is a loving God like You, (2) who pardons [literally carries or elevates] intentional sin, (3) and overlooks even the outright rebellion (4) of the remnant of His beloved inheritance [i.e., Hashem does not destroy our sins completely as if they never existed; He rather waits for us to regret having done them, and then transforms them into merits because they served as stepping stones

73 Berakhot 18b.
in our coming closer to Him]. (5) He has never been known to retain His anger forever, (6) for He truly desires [to bestow] loving-kindness. (7) He will therefore again have mercy on us, and subdue our intentional sins [i.e., again Hashem subdues and preserves our sins in order to transform them into greater merits]. (9) O cast all our wrongdoings into the depths of the sea [to wash them and thereby raise up and restore the sparks of holiness in them to their proper place]. (10) Grant truth [i.e., validate and fulfill Your promise] to Yaacov, (11) [and reveal Your unconditional] loving-kindness to Avraham, (12) as You promised our forefathers (13) from days of old” (Micah 7:18-20).

We thus stand by the water reciting these Thirteen Attributes, and as we get to the ninth attribute, we turn our pockets inside out and shake them to show that we are letting go of our sins and casting them into the water.

But how many people know that this is not like throwing garbage into a garbage can, never to see it again? Rather, according to the Ari of blessed memory, it is more like throwing dirty clothes in a washing machine and waiting for the sudsy water to do its job of eliminating the dirt and returning our clothes to us fresh and clean. This is based on the idea that there is no sin that does not contain some spark of holiness, i.e., a subtle aspect of our own vital energy that we need to reclaim. In other words, just as we would never throw out our dirty clothes with the wash water, but rather let the water rinse away all the impurities that attached to them and reclaim the clothes, so too must we reclaim this vital energy that we put, advertently or inadvertently, into sinning, and use it serve HaShem more powerfully now than if we had never sinned. It is for this reason that we should wait until the good energy that was trapped until now in our negative actions and character traits floats back up to the top so that we can reclaim it for positive use. This is why, the Ari explains, we cast our wrongdoings into the depths of sea. It is to wash them and thereby raise up and restore the sparks of holiness they contain to their proper place and use.  

**Before Hashem**

Confession (viduy) is a private affair. It must therefore take place lifnei Hashem, literally “before God.” Rambam makes this clear when he writes, “But sins between man and God should not be made public, and a person is considered brazen-faced if he does so. Rather, he should repent before Hashem, blessed be He, declaring his sins before Him and confessing them.”

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik spoke about this:

Judaism views man as standing before God always—it does not accept a division between two worlds, one in which man stands before God and the other in which man flees from Him. Man is always standing before God—whether he be in the study-hall, the office, the synagogue, or in the bedroom. At all times, wherever he may be, man is standing before Him, before the Holy One blessed-be-He.

And yet, when man sins, he creates a distance between himself and God. To sin means to remove oneself from the presence of the Master of the universe. “I was standing before You and sin came and estranged me from You, and I no longer feel that I am before You.” The whole essence of the precept of repentance is longing, yearning, pining to return once again to being “before You.” [When a person confesses, he is therefore saying:] “Free me

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74 See Shaar HaKavanot, Inyan Tashlikh, p. 90b top.
75 Rambam, Laws of Repentance 2:5.
Confession forces us to awaken to the reality of Hashem’s Existence right now, in the present, then in the past, and then in the future. For only when the reality of His Eternal Presence literally overwhelms us right now, at this very moment, can we begin to admit to ourselves that whatever wrong we committed in the past also did not take place in a vacuum. God was with us even when we were not aware of His Presence.

And God does not only pay attention to what we did wrong. He knows all about us, the good as well as the bad. A large part of teshuvah thus involves acknowledging our good points and building on them.

Finally, confession includes the realization that, from this moment on, our entire future, everything we do, will forever be before Hashem. Death itself cannot separate us from our God. On the contrary, death will no longer be seen as an end but as a continuation of our lives in eternity. Instead of shrinking from the awesome realization of Hashem’s Presence, we are cleansed by it.

Three Moments of Teshuvah
We thus learn that teshuvah-return (i.e., awakening to God’s Presence in our lives) can take place at three different “moments”:

(1) Teshuvah for the past: we usually think of returning in teshuvah after we have done something wrong. Certainly, in view of the fact that the numbing effect of sin has already set in, this is already a great attainment. If a person can be honest enough to admit he did wrong even after the deed has been perpetrated, this is indeed praiseworthy. But this is only the first level.

(2) Teshuvah in the present: we can return in teshuvah at the very moment we are doing something wrong. This is extremely difficult.

(3) Teshuvah for the future: we can return in teshuvah before we do wrong. That is, we can catch ourselves when the wrong we are about to do is still a thought or a word. This is not as difficult as it sounds. With practice, i.e., the more we become familiar with the way our thinking process works, we can actually catch ourselves before we think, say, or do something wrong.

What advantage is there to all this? The advantage is incredible, priceless. In order to understand just how priceless it is, we need only ask what actually does happen when we do wrong. We get robbed. The very energy with which we were born and which we are to use in order to grow to our full stature gets stolen—usually before we are even aware of its value and its availability to us. Teshuvah is the way Hashem gave us to reclaim that precious energy. Once we return in teshuvah for mistakes we made in the past, we become more sensitive to the mistakes we are making in the present. We then can become so sensitive that we can stop ourselves from doing something wrong the second it reaches our consciousness. In doing this kind of teshuvah, we begin to reclaim all the energy we need to live fuller, more empowered lives. As a nation, we also reconnect to the power of our ancestors. We begin to fulfill our mission. Teshuvah is the beginning of all this and more.
Basic Laws of Teshuvah

Rambam mentioned that realizing how we are "before Hashem" at all times is an essential part of teshuvah. This phrase has another important meaning. It is reminiscent of the Mishnah which says:

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah explained the verse: “On this day [Yom Kippur] He [God] will grant you atonement, so that you will be cleansed. Before Hashem you will be cleansed of all your unintentional sins” (Leviticus 16:30). The words 'before Hashem' teach us that Yom Kippur atones for sins between man and God. It does not atone for sins between man and man, however, until a person appeases his friend [by making amends and asking his forgiveness].

When a person sins against God alone, God alone can forgive him. But when one sins against another human being, he must first make the necessary restitution and gain forgiveness from the one he has wronged. Neither repentance, nor Yom Kippur, nor death itself, can wipe out a sin until forgiveness has been earnestly sought from the one against whom it was committed.

Every sin against man is also a sin against God. However, even the sin against God is not forgiven until forgiveness has been obtained for having sinned against our fellow man. Therefore, although we are required to confess such sins before God, our confession is not valid until restitution has been made and the victim's forgiveness obtained.

If we have hurt another in any way, we must seek forgiveness even though we have made monetary restitution for the injury. Similarly, if we rob another, besides making restitution, we must also seek forgiveness for the anguish caused by the robbery. Of course, in a case of purely monetary damage, where there was no intent to hurt the victim, monetary restitution is a complete atonement.

In order to repent, we must make complete restitution for any theft or damage. If the injured person is not to be found, however, we need not seek him out, but can leave the restitution money with a competent rabbinical court and thus obtain complete atonement.

For repentance to be complete, we must cleanse ourselves of the taint of any illegal gain, even where restitution is not required by law. Therefore, if we have stolen from or hurt a number of persons, and do not know which, we must make restitution to all in order to repent completely. Similarly, we must make good all loss, as well as any pain and shame, that may have resulted from our action. We must also make restitution for all profits or any other benefits we may have accumulated as a result of the act. Even if stolen land has been in one's family for many generations, one is considered responsible, and is required to return it.

The Downward Spiral of Sin

In the Viduy quoted at the beginning of this chapter we read: "On the contrary, [we want to admit to You and to ourselves that] we have erred (chatanu), we have transgressed intentionally in order to satisfy our lust (avinu), and we have rebelliously committed crimes which have caused us to become coarse and insensitive and therefore unworthy of Your forgiveness (peshaanu)."

77 Yoma 85b.
78 Rosh Hashanah 17b.
Chatanu, avinu, pashaanu. The Torah uses three primary terms to define sin: chet, avon, and pesha (see Exodus 34:7). On Yom Kippur the Cohen Gadol would pray for atonement for his people by admitting, “Your people Israel have erred (chet), deliberately disobeyed (avon), and obstinately violated (pesha).”

The cycle begins with chet, unintentional sin or error. The word chet carries an additional connotation. This is brought out in the verse describing the fighting men of the tribe of Benjamin: “There were seven hundred chosen men, left-handed, every one of whom could sling stones at a hair, and not miss” (Judges 20:16). “And not miss” is velo yachti in Hebrew. This is the source for the Hebrew expression, lehachti et hamatarah, literally, to miss the mark or to veer off course.

We are all prone to make mistakes, miss the mark, and fall off course. But earth is a school in which, if we learn from our mistakes, the net gain can offset the loss. The main thing is to get back on track. Only when we fail to learn from our mistakes do we tend to get tangled in the nets of rationalization. Perhaps we minimize the gravity of a misdeed, assuaging our conscience that we haven’t done such a great evil after all. Conversely, we may feel that we cannot resist the temptation, that it is too great, that we are incapable of overcoming such a formidable test.

This rationalization process is itself a sin. It can correspond to the Hebrew term for transgression, averah. Averah is related to laavor (to cross over). By transgressing an averah, one oversteps one’s bounds and crosses the line between chet (unintentional error) and avon (intentional sin). This is perhaps why averah (עברה) and avon (עון) are related phonetically to iver (ועיר) (blindness), ivut (ועיך) (distortion), and avel (עבל) (perversion).

Avon is traditionally defined as a deliberate sin performed with the intention of satisfying a lust. Avon is considered intentional because deep down a person knows when he is rationalizing, and he is held accountable for it. If chet is straying from the straight path, avon is avoiding and denying reality, and ultimately fleeing from the truth. As above, the modern term for avon is cognitive dissonance, the sort of static produced in our psyche when we confront information telling us we’re wrong. Anything conveying the message that we’re wrong is irritating, and is usually met with discomfort. It poses a threat to our self-esteem, a blow to the ego. When we are caught in the transgression > blindness > distortion > perversion > intentional-sin syndrome, we will do anything to flee reality, deny its existence, and avoid seeing things the way they really are.

A man may know without a shadow of a doubt that he has sinned and is diverted from his life’s goal, having betrayed all his values. He even knows why—but is not ready to say so openly or to hear it from others...He lies awake at night and thinks about it; his soul cries out in the darkness; but in the light of day, in the eyes of others, he seems happy and content. In order to hide the truth that is eating away inside of him, he continues to sin, picks up speed and rushes madly towards the brink of the abyss.80

The sinner, say the sages of the Kabbalah, does not have an integrated personality. The sinner’s personality is a schizophrenic personality. Diffuse, alienated, and blown to and fro by each gust of wind; one part of him may be found in one realm while another part of him is in another realm altogether. The sinner behaves in an inconsistent manner. The curse of “and the Lord shall scatter you among the nations” refers not only to a nation, but also to the individual sinner. His capabilities, his spiritual powers, his emotions, and his thoughts

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80 R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, in Peli, On Repentance, p. 103.
are without internal cohesion; he has no single axis around which his personality revolves. For such a person, repentance leads to “the ingathering of the exiles,” meaning the unification and concentration of the personality which has been shattered to smithereens as a consequence of sin.\textsuperscript{81}

The ancient rabbis spoke about \textit{chet} as a spirit of folly (\textit{ruach shtut}) which enters a person and blinds him to the real consequences of his actions.\textsuperscript{82} When we first make a mistake, therefore, it is necessary to correct it immediately, before it becomes ingrained. We need to banish the spirit of folly and come back to our senses. If this is not done, a certain distortion sets in. Our perception becomes twisted. We no longer view reality as it is, but begin to rationalize our vice and think of it as a virtue. We are then more susceptible to sinning intentionally in order to satisfy our lust. At one point, because the psychic pain is too great, we repress any sense of regret. We become expert in rationalizing to the extent that nothing bothers us any more. Examples of this downward spiraling process are alcohol and drug addiction (including tobacco), overeating, petty theft, constant irritability.

In all these cases, a spirit of folly, i.e., a certain kind of perceptual distortion sets in and becomes part of us. It causes us to perceive evil things as good, and vice-versa. When this spirit is not evicted forthright, and the sin is repeated two or three times and more, the sin seems like the most natural thing in the world. There is no greater distortion than this.

One who says, “I will give in and sin (\textit{chet}) now and repent afterwards...I will give in and sin now and repent afterwards...” will be prevented [from heaven] from repenting.\textsuperscript{83}

Why does the Mishnah repeat twice, “I will give in...I will give in...”? This is to indicate that when a man transgresses once and then repeats it, it becomes for him like something permissible.\textsuperscript{84}

At this point a person can still break the cycle of sin. He can return in \textit{teshuvah}. As above, he can even come out of the experience with a net gain: Having tasted the sweetness of sin and its sting, he will be wiser than if he hadn’t sinned. If, however, he does not break the cycle, but continues to shield himself from the truth, he will fall further into \textit{pesha}, committing crimes which cause him to become coarse and insensitive and therefore unworthy of Hashem’s forgiveness. Following this is \textit{resa}, where he becomes twisted inside and gets caught in the trap of his own wickedness. The final result is \textit{ra}, complete, unmitigated evil.

In our prayers we ask to be released and saved from this downward spiraling cycle. By its very definition, this is what prayer and communion with God is about. Prayer is self-evaluation, intensified a hundred-fold because it is done with the clear consciousness that we are in the presence of the Omniscient One. It is not an escape but rather a confrontation with the reality of our lives.

**The Net Gain of Sin?**

We emphasized above that \textit{teshuvah} brings a person closer to Hashem than before he sinned. This is not usually attained in one step, certainly not by most of us. The Talmud therefore makes a distinction between two types or levels of \textit{teshuvah}: “\textit{teshuvah from fear}”

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{81} On Repentance, p. 329; p. 306 in new Aaronson edition.
  \item \textsuperscript{82} Sotah 3a.
  \item \textsuperscript{83} Mishnah Yoma 8:9.
  \item \textsuperscript{84} Talmud Yoma 87a.
\end{itemize}
and “teshuvah from love.” According to the Talmud, “teshuvah from fear” neutralizes intentional sins (avon) and turns them into unintentional mistakes (chet).\(^{85}\)

But this is just the beginning. It is like a reprieve to allow us to get back on our feet. Once we have begun to reestablish our original closeness with our Creator, we are to refine ourselves even more and transform ourselves, not only by dissociating ourselves from that which is wrong, but by positively involving ourselves with the performance of mitzvot and good deeds. This is the next stage of "teshuvah from love," the positive effects of which will bring us even closer to Hashem than before. Through teshuvah from love our former misdeeds are not only neutralized, but considered meritorious acts (because they actually prepared the way for our coming closer to Him than before we sinned). Thus, according to the Talmud, “teshuvah from love transforms our intentional sins into merits.”

For what is love but the desire to bond with the one we love. Bonding itself involves dissolving whatever boundaries exist between the lover and the beloved. Bonding in love means becoming one with the beloved. This is alluded to in the numerical value of the words for "love” and "oneness.” Numerically, ahavah-love and echad-one both equal 13.

Love is also the desire to do something, anything, for the Beloved, even give one’s life. This is consistent with the root meaning of the word ahavah. Its two root letters are hav, which mean “giving.” When the deep power of love that lies dormant in the human heart is focused on God, the most natural reaction is to want to give back to Him that which is most precious to us.

When love is allowed to well forth from the depths of our beings for the One who made us, we become transformed. The heart opens to embrace life in its fullness. We begin to extract the deeper lessons of our lives because we now accept who we are and who we have been, both of which are preparatory for moving toward who we are capable of being.

We accept and embrace the totality of who we are. Love not only binds us to the Beloved but allows us to love ourselves. We reclaim the parts of ourselves that we hated most. They can no longer operate “independently” to undermine us. They are embraced and transformed. We learn from our mistakes. More, we grow from our mistakes. We grow so much that, in heaven, it is considered as if our former misdeeds actually led to true refinement and closeness to Hashem. This is the power of teshuvah from love.

Similar to a school, our lives here on earth will be seen as moving from lower grades to higher grades in which mistakes were part of the learning process, and, because we lacked understanding, we will not be held accountable for having done wrong. But this is only when we have truly repented from the depths of our hearts, from true love, and not only from any fear of punishment or revenge.

Similar to the Talmud’s distinction between teshuvah from fear and teshuvah from love, Rabbi Soloveitchik distinguishes between “teshuvah of expiation” and “teshuvah of redemption.” Through the teshuvah of expiation, God pardons our sin and erases it from the books. But teshuvah of redemption does not involve breaking with the past. It does not entail annihilating evil, but rather rectifying it and elevating it.

Sin is thus not to be forgotten, blotted out. On the contrary, sin has to be remembered. It is the memory of sin that releases the power within the inner depths of the soul of the

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\(^{85}\) Yoma 86b.
penitent to do greater good than ever before. The energy of sin can be used to bring one to new heights.\textsuperscript{86}

This is why, Rabbi Soloveitchik explains, David, the spiritual author of Psalms, is called "the man who raised high the yoke of \textit{teshuvah}.\textsuperscript{87} David is the soul of Israel, and as such he is to serve as an example to every individual soul that is or was or ever will be born as. For although he sinned, he repented. He took sin, and out of it constructed the yoke of \textit{teshuvah}. The Five Books of Psalms, corresponding to the Five Books of the Torah, is the Book of \textit{Teshuvah} of Redemption.

\textbf{Communal and Inter-generational Responsibility}

"And this goes for us, our parents, and the members of our families [whether now or in previous lifetimes]."

Quoting the Ari, the \textit{Ben Ish Chai} writes, "A person is not only punished for his own sins. Because all Jews are connected, and together they constitute a single 'body' which includes many 'limbs,' one person can be punished for his brother's wrongdoing. For this reason, the men of the Great Assembly arranged the \textit{Viduy} in the plural. Each person must therefore say the entire \textit{Viduy} (slowly and with a truly broken heart, repenting for every type of sin mentioned), even if he is sure that he himself has not committed such sins. He should not be concerned lest it be considered that he has lied by admitting something that is not true. On the contrary, as we have said, he must also truly repent even for what other Jews might have done wrong.\textsuperscript{88}

\textit{Ben Ish Chai} and \textit{Kaf haChayim} both provide another reason for saying the entire \textit{Viduy}: "A person must repent and ask forgiveness for what may have been done in previous lifetimes. For this reason we say, 'And this goes for us and our parents [ancestors],' i.e., besides our actual parents, our previous lifetimes are considered the spiritual ancestors of our present incarnation.\textsuperscript{89}

For these reasons we should all take the \textit{Viduy} very seriously and hope to free ourselves and all other Jews from repeating any of these sins by completely dissociating from them. We may then approach our Creator and ask not only that He forgive us, but that He liberate and re-elevate us (individually and collectively) in order to utilize the potential He gave us (which we have misused) to truly serve Him. May He allow us to fulfill our purposes in this lifetime, and to correct and perfect all that we have been born to correct and perfect.

\textbf{Guilt}

"\textit{Ashamnu}—we plead guilty; [no excuses; no attempt to evade consequences; we feel that we have become spiritually desolate and empty]."

Ramban sees the root of the word \textit{asham} (guilt) as \textit{shamem}, the feeling of desolation and emptiness that results from sin.\textsuperscript{90} In addition, by virtue of the fact that it is counted here among the things that we have done that are wrong, \textit{ashamnu} can be understood not only as the result of having sinned, but as a sin in and of itself. \textit{Ashamnu} is the sin of excessive guilt! When we constantly feel guilty, this actually prevents us from doing \textit{teshuvah}.

\textsuperscript{86} Peli, \textit{ibid.} pp. 274ff.
\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Moed Katan} 16b.
\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Ben Ish Chai, Parashat Ki Tissa}, introductory remarks and \textit{halakhah aleph}.
\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Kaf HaChayim, Orach Chayim} 131:16-17.
\textsuperscript{90} Ramban, Leviticus 5:15.
This is similar to the difference between the guilty conscience and the Godly conscience. The guilty conscience browbeats us and makes us feel bad about ourselves by lowering our self-esteem and self-respect. It speaks from beneath the threshold of consciousness, whispering to us how rotten we are. Unchecked, it can make us believe that we are the lowest creature in the world. By undermining our self-image, it weakens us, and sets us up to do the very things that make us feel self-loathing. This is exactly its ploy: by making us feel excessively guilty about things we have done that have lowered our self-esteem, it sets us up to do those very things again and again. And we fall for it!

The Godly conscience, on the other hand, is more like a light that shines on us and stops us in our tracks. "Hold it! What are you doing!" And if we try to hide by saying, "Me? Oh nothing. I was just…" or, "I couldn’t help it," or, "It's not so bad," it stops us again, saying, "Don’t minimize and don’t maximize it. Don’t go into your guilt-trip; just own up to what you were just doing! If you own up, I will free you from having to do it again.”

**Transitioning from Exile to Redemption**

There is an inner pathway that moves from exile, *Eretz Mitzrayim* (the land of constrictions, double-binds, and slavery to Pharaoh) >>> to redemption, *Eretz Yisrael* (the land of closeness to God, closeness to our selves).

![מלשון מירcea]

Accessing the pathway often involves an important intermediary step, emptying ourselves, letting go of all that we thought we needed in order to be us. This corresponds to our going out into the desert wilderness when we left *Mitzrayim*… a willingness to leave that which is familiar (*lekh lekha me’artzekha*) to face the unknown (*el ha’aretz asher arekha*), in order to come face to face with our *yiud* (higher destiny). Then and only then can we enter the Promised Land, build our Temple, and participate in the complete transformation of this world with *Mashiach*.

In a sense, leaving *Mitzrayim* parallels our soul leaving our body, i.e., dying to this world, dying to our small self. Receiving the Torah at Sinai parallels the soul’s ascent to the soul world, where it unfolds its wings and returns to its fullness and glory. Now it understands all that it experienced, even the suffering it endured, and accepts the wisdom of God’s plan. Entering *Eretz Yisrael* parallels the resurrection, the return of the soul to fully enlighten and irradiate the body, to elevate the body up into itself for all eternity.

This inner pathway thus leads from *chisaron* (a sense of lack, a feeling that we aren’t what-where-who we are supposed to be or want to be) >>>> to *cherut* (true freedom as opposed to illusory freedom), to liberating ourselves from old patterns, to *hitchadshut* (renewal) and *yichud* (unification of all the parts of ourselves into the service of God—“leyached levavenu le’ahavah uleyirah et shemekha”), *hit’achdut* (integration, integrity) and *sheleimut* (moving toward wholeness).

In terms of the dynamic of the *selichot* process, this thread leads from sin, which begins with *chet* (error), moves to *avon* (seemingly uncontrollable desires, followed by
rationalization), and then pesha (loss of connection to the true self), and resha (complete identification with the crime, “that’s me, that’s who I am, I’m no good”) >>>>> to selichah (rapprochement, forgiveness), mechilah (pardon), kapparah (cleansing, atonement, and transformation), taharah (purity of action and purity of intent), berakhah (experiencing Hashem’s blessing in our life), daat (heightened awareness, consciousness), hashgachah (heightened awareness of Hashem’s providence and guidance in our life), Shekhinah (heightened awareness of Hashem’s presence in our life and everywhere), kedushah (holiness, elevation of our whole life to a higher plane), simchah (uncontrollable joy, bubbly excitement, elation), todah (awesome thankfulness for being alive), ahavah (love for Hashem and all His creations; feeling His closeness and His love healing us), yirat ha’rommemut (awe of Hashem’s infiniteness beyond anything we have ever known), devekut (bonding, oneness, ecstasy).

In the terminology of the Zohar and Chabad, it leads from hit’kafya (repression of the negative aspects of our personality; constantly fighting to overcome, and then falling, and then again fighting) >>>>> to hit’hafkhiya (inner transformation and integration of all disparate parts of ourselves into a higher unity).

All of this is embodied in our prayers as the movement from Viduy (owning up, coming clean, admitting the truth to ourselves, the good as well as the bad) >>>>> to the Yod-Gimel Midot haRachamim (the revelation of the 13 Attributes of Mercy on Sinai, following the sin of the golden calf), namely, a completely rectified and transformed relationship between Hashem and ourselves.

All of the above has been a preparation for what follows. We begin by taking responsibility for our actions, overcoming the tendency to make excuses, blame our parents and society, blame life, and even blame God. This then opens the door for Hashem to reveal the deeper dimension of divine mercy that lies above and beyond the dimension of human action.
Chapter 8

The Yod-Gimel Midot
HaRachamim

Immediately following the Viduy, we proclaim the Yod-Gimel Midot HaRachamim (Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy):

אל אַפַּיִם אַתָּה עֵדָה בַּעֲלֵהוֹרַחֲמִים. בְּרָכַת רַחֲמִיק וְסִיפָדָיו חֲדָשִׁית חֲדָשִׁית לְעָנִי מְפֶלֶט. וּמִי חֵוָב בְּחֵוָב.

But You, O God, are erakh apayim [patient and slow to anger]. You are the Master of mercy. Long ago You revealed the magnitude of Your mercy and Your loving-kindness to the humble one [Moshe]. And thus it is written in Your Torah: “Hashem descended in a cloud [of glory] and stood with him [Moshe] there, and He, Hashem, called out in the merciful Name.” There it was said:

יָשָׁמֶשׁ חָנָן וְרַחֲמִים וְאֶרֶךְ אֶרֶךְ אֵל אֱלֹהֵי אָבֵד מֵעָנָי עָשָׂה וַיִּרְכֹּר יַעֲבֹר עַל פָּנָי וַיִּקְרָא יְהֹוָה יְהֹוָה וְרַב חֶסֶד וְבַעֲל הָרַחֲמִים.

Hashem passed over His face [overcame and transformed His attribute of justice and taught Moshe the secret of arousing His love and His mercy by] calling out: “Hashem! Hashem! (1) El (Loving God), (2) rachum (merciful) (3) vechanun (and gracious), (4) erakh (patient) (5) apayim (kind-faced, slow to anger); (6) verav chesed (bestowing love abundantly) (7) ve’met (and truthfully); (8) notzer chesed (safeguarding the good deeds [of the great-grandparents]) (9) la’alafim (for thousands of generations); (10) nosei avon (forgiving transgression), (11) vafesha (rebellion) (12) vechataah (and error), (13) venakei (and cleansing)” (Exodus 34:5-7).

After the revelation of the Aseret HaDibrot (Ten Commandments), Hashem ordered Moshe to ascend Sinai to receive those same commandments engraved on/in a pair of stone tablets—made in Heaven and engraved by the finger of God (Exodus 24:12, 31:18, 32:16; Deuteronomy 9:9-11, 10:1-5).

At the very end of his forty-day absence, just as Moshe was about to descend with the tablets, Bnei Yisrael were tested. The test was commensurate with the revelation that preceded it. Because we had experienced such a high level of prophecy, the stakes were set extremely high. If we passed the test, the whole world would return to the level of Adam and Eve before the sin. If not, that incredible level of Godliness would not be revealed again in the world until the Messianic Age.

At the moment the erev rav (mixed multitude) began worshiping the golden calf, Moshe was not only at the top of Sinai. He had been taken up above the physical world into the spiritual realm. Nevertheless, at that moment, Hashem told him, “Descend, for your people (amekha) whom you have brought out of Mitzrayim have become corrupt” (Exodus 32:7; Deuteronomy 9:12). “I have seen this people (ha’am), and behold it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore leave
Me (i.e., do not try to stop Me) when I unleash My wrath against them to destroy them! I will make you into a great nation” (Exodus 32:10).91

When Moshe heard the words, “hanicha li—leave Me,” he understood that Hashem was actually giving him an opening to plead for mercy on Israel’s behalf. He prayed (32:11-13) and Hashem relented (32:14). "Moshe then turned and began going down the mountain with the two tablets of testimony in his hand” (32:15). As he approached the camp and saw the people worshipping and dancing around the golden calf, he immediately decided that the only way to break the idol’s spell on them was to cast down the precious stone tablets. He did, and the thunderous sound of their shattering froze them in their places (32:19).

Moshe then had the golden calf smelted and ground to fine powder. He mixed the powder in water and made the people drink it [the first instance of homeopathic medicine in the Bible] (Exodus 32:20; Deuteronomy 9:21).

Moshe ascended Sinai early the next day to plead for mercy. Like the Cohen Gadol pleading for his people on Yom Kippur, he said viduy on behalf of the people and asked Hashem to forgive them (32:31-32).

Soon after, Moshe made a request to Hashem: “Make the way behind Your ways known to me, so that I will know how to please You” (33:13).92 According to the Talmud, Moshe wanted

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91 The tradition contains a built-in ambiguity concerning the identity of ha'am ("the people"). According to some sources (Ibn Ezra, Hirsch), ha'am refers to the children of Israel. According to the Zohar, the Ari, Alshikh, Kli Yakar, Gra, Or HaChayim, Maor VaShemesh, etc., ha'am is a code-word for the erev rav. Both traditions are true. That is, Ibn Ezra and Hirsch maintain correctly that even if the Israelites were not directly involved in worshipping the golden calf, they are nevertheless morally culpable in view of the fact that they did not try to stop those who were involved. This follows the Talmud (Shabbat 54b), “Whoever has the ability to protest against a wrongdoing by the members of his household or by the people of his town, or even the entire world...but does not protest is held accountable for their transgressions.”

92 On the level of the individual [wherein the erev rav corresponds to each person's yetzer (evil urge)], it would be ludicrous for a person to claim, when caught in the act of committing a crime, "My yetzer made me do it!" The same is true with regard to the erev rav. In terms of moral culpability, the Torah is clear: each person is responsible for his or her actions.

Even the Zohar itself (parashat Beshalach, 2:45b) makes an important distinction in the use of the word ha'am (since it is not clear that this term refers to the erev rav every time it is used). On the verse, "God made the people (ha'am) take a roundabout path by way of the desert" (Exodus 13:18), Rabbi Yehudah therefore asks, "How can it be? When the Israelites were still in Egypt, even before they were circumcised, and certainly before they were bound to the Holy One as is befitting, it is written concerning them, 'Let My people (ami) go!' (Exodus 5:1) and 'Let My people (ami) go so that they may serve Me...’ (9:1). Here, however, after they were circumcised, and after they had already performed all the commandments associated with the Pesach offering, and had become bound to Him, He merely calls them ha'am, 'the people! [There is a difference between ami and ha'am. Ami is a term of endearment, whereas ha'am is not.] Rather, here, He called Israel ha'am because of the erev rav who attached themselves to Israel and intermingled with them. It is thus written, 'Ha'am (the people) gathered around Aharon and demanded: Make us gods who will go before us...’ (32:1), and 'Hashem struck ha'am (the people) with a plague because of the calf that Aharon had made’ (32:35)."

Rabbi Chayim Vital explains (in his gloss to the Zohar): "As opposed to the accepted position of the Zohar that 'whenever the term ha'am is used, it refers exclusively to the erev rav,' Rabbi Yehudah maintains that ha'am can refer to Israel as well due to the fact that the erev rav became intermingled with them. Certainly, Rabbi Yehudah would agree that only Israel is called ami, 'My people'. ...Nevertheless, Israel is also referred to as ha'am whenever the Torah wishes to emphasize their having been influenced by the erev rav."

We have translated the key word derakhekha (דְּרָכֶ֥קֶחְךָ) in this verse according to Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch. He points out that this word is spelled singular ("Your way") but voweled and therefore pronounced plural ("Your ways"). It thus catches the subtlety of Moshe's real request to Hashem, "Please make the way behind all Your ways known to me," i.e., the underlying uniformity behind the apparent diversity. It is significant that there are specifically thirteen attributes of mercy. In Hebrew, the gematria of the word echad, referring to Hashem's oneness, is thirteen: aleph = 1, chet = 8, dalet = 4. In other words, thirteen is a symbolic number. It embodies perfectly the hidden presence of oneness behind all multiplicity.
to know how Hashem judges mankind. How do divine mercy and divine justice combine to work together?\(^93\)

Hashem answered by revealing the *Yod-Gimel Midot HaRachamim* (Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy).

These attributes revolve around the same dynamic we have seen above: (1) Hashem’s desire to bestow His love on all His creatures unconditionally, and (2) His desire that we earn this love. Because of this dynamic we are told that, whenever we have forfeited our right to exist by having misused our God-given free will, we can nevertheless re-establish our connection with Hashem on an even higher level if we will only regret what we have done and resolve to rectify our mistakes. Sincere *teshuvah* for all wrongdoing is all that is necessary to arouse His mercy and obtain complete forgiveness.

Many people ask: How do we actually do *teshuvah*? What do we do besides just saying that we will repent? Obviously, it is not enough to just recite the thirteen attributes. This is emphasized by the Talmud’s statement, “let them enact (*yaasu*) this order.”\(^94\)

So what then is needed?

A partial answer is provided by the Talmud, where the concept of *maavir al midotav* is discussed. Rabba taught: \(^95\)

Anyone who *maavir al midotav*—passes over or overcomes his own tendencies [to hold a grudge against those who wrong him, to act out of spite, to be overcome with anger, to deny the truth in order to escape punishment, etc.] *maavirim mimenu kol peshaav*—will merit to have even his intentional sins passed over or removed, as the verse says, "*Nosei avon ve’over al pesha*—pardons transgression and passes over crime" *(Micah 7:18)*. Hashem pardons the transgression of he who passes over the crime [that others committed against him]."

Similarly, the Talmud says that Rebbi Eliezer prayed for rain and was not answered, while Rebbi Akiva was. A voice from heaven proclaimed: "[Rebbi Akiva] was answered not because he is greater, but because *maavir al midotav* [he is able to overcome his inborn traits]."\(^96\)

The concept of *maavir al midotav* involves overcoming those very inborn traits or tendencies which seem so natural but which nevertheless prevent us from attaining our full potential. There is an entire list of negative tendencies, including anger, spite, jealousy, and lust. Without divine assistance we have little hope of overcoming and transforming them into positive modes of serving Hashem. One major hurdle that prevents us from even beginning to repent involves the all-too-human tendency to deny having done wrong.

In sum, the revelation of the *Yod-Gimel Midot* to Moshe after the sin of the golden calf teaches us that Hashem will overcome (overrule, repeal, and revoke) His own fatherly anger at our having done wrong only when we make a sincere effort to admit and overcome our own faults.

As we saw above, this dynamic is also hinted at in the morning prayers themselves. Immediately after the *Akedah Yitzchak* (Binding of Isaac), we pray:

\(^93\) *Berakhot* 7a. *Rosh Hashanah* 17a.
\(^94\) *Rosh Hashanah* 17b, see text below.
\(^95\) *Megillah* 28a.
\(^96\) *Taanit* 25b.
“Master of the universe! Just as our father Avraham overcame his compassion [for Yitzchak] in order to wholeheartedly fulfill Your Will, so may Your compassion overcome Your anger, and may Your compassion prevail over Your more judgmental attributes…”

We then recite the Yod-Gimel Midot as they appear in Micah:

(1) Who is a loving God like You, (2) who pardons [literally carries or elevates] intentional sin, (3) and overlooks even the outright rebellion (4) of the remnant of His beloved inheritance [i.e., Hashem does not destroy our sins completely as if they never existed; He rather waits for us to regret having done them, and then transforms them into merits because they served as stepping stones in our coming closer to Him]. (5) He has never been known to retain His anger forever, (6) for He truly desires [to bestow] loving-kindness. (7) He will therefore again have mercy on us, and subdue our intentional sins [i.e., again Hashem subdues and preserves our sins in order to transform them into greater merits]. (9) O cast all our wrongdoings into the depths of the sea [to wash them and thereby raise up and restore the sparks of holiness in them to their proper place]. (10) Grant truth [i.e., validate and fulfill Your promise] to Yaacov, (11) [and reveal Your unconditional] loving-kindness to Avraham, (12) as You promised our forefathers (13) from days of old” (Micah 7:18-20).

"Vayered YKVK be’anan vayityatzev imo sham—Hashem descended in a cloud [of glory] and stood with him [Moshe] there" [Alternatively: "Hashem lowered His presence in a cloud to where Moshe stood on Mount Sinai"] (Exodus 34:5). Onkelos consistently translates the word vayered (descended) as veitgalei (manifested or revealed), thereby eliminating any spatial and/or corporeal connotation. Similarly, it is preferable to imagine God’s descending in an anan (cloud) or surrounding the children of Israel in ananei kavod (clouds of glory) not as physical clouds but more like an electro-magnetic force-field. The same goes for such prophetic expressions as the throne of glory and wings of the Shekhinah. All of these can be understood as different levels or expressions of Hashem’s providence and care, different frequencies of revelation.

"Vayikra beshem, YKVK—and He, Hashem, called out in the merciful Name" (Exodus 34:5). Here, in this verse, based on the trope sign (atnach) beneath the word beshem, it is clear that Hashem Himself "called out in the merciful name." 97

In the following verse, on the other hand, there are two built-in ambiguities, “Vayaavor YKVK al panav vayikra—Hashem passed over His/his face and He/he called out…” That is, (1) it is not certain whether Hashem passed over His own face or Moshe’s, and (2) it is not clear whether it was just Hashem who called out the thirteen attributes of mercy, or whether it also includes the idea that He was teaching Moshe how to call out as well. 98

For our purposes, both of these are true, i.e., Hashem first called out “YKVK, YKVK,” the two names that precede the attributes, followed immediately by the attributes themselves, "Kel rachum vechanun...” What we learn from the ambiguous vayikra (and He/he called out) is that He then told Moshe to do the same. Based on the image of the shaliach tzibur (prayer leader) that we will see below, 99 we can even conjecture that Hashem called out the names and the attributes a number of times, each time exhorting Moshe to do the same, until they were both calling out at the same time! Whatever the case, similar to the blowing of the shofar, this verse (with its two mentions of the name, plus the thirteen attributes) contains the secret of how to transform judgment into mercy. It is not by chance therefore that, in many

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97 Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Seferno, Gur Aryeh, ad loc.
98 This is definitely suggested in two sources: Rosh Hashanah 17b; Rashi on Exodus 33:19, s.v. vekarati.
99 Rosh Hashanah 17b.
communities, the shofar is blown simultaneously as every member of the congregation raises his voice to call out these thirteen attributes.

**Prophetic Vision**

"Vayaavor YVKV al panav vayikra—Hashem passed over His/his face and He/he called out" (Exodus 34:6). In the Mekhilta, the rabbis state that Hashem appeared to Israel in prophetic vision at the Red Sea as a young warrior, whereas at Sinai He appeared as an Ancient of Days filled with mercy.¹⁰⁰

In the Shir HaKavod (Song of Glory) that is sung in many Ashkenazic and Chasidic minyanim at the conclusion of the Shabbat Mussaf, we sing:

"I will sing sweet melodies and compose insightful songs, for my soul yearns [and calls out] for You alone. / My soul pines [to take refuge under] the shade of Your Hand, to know the ultimate mystery of Your enigmas. / When I mention Your glory, my heart becomes impassioned with Your love. / I will therefore speak of weighty things concerning You, and honor Your Name with songs of my deep love. /"

¹⁰⁰ Mekhilta Beshalach, on Exodus 15:3, “Hashem is a man of war.”
The locks of His hair are likened to a youth's. His black sidecurls flow down in mounds. / May the shrine of righteousness (Beit HaMikdash) be His crown of splendor. May Jerusalem be prized by Him above His highest joy. / May His treasured nation be a diadem (tefillin) on His arm, and a corona of kingship, tefillin of splendor [on His head]. / He gave birth to them and carried them [out of Mitzrayim]. [On Sinai] He attached the adornments of Eden to their heads. He honored them [with His Torah], for they were more precious [than the angels] in His eyes.

In the beginning of Your word (Torah) is engraved the word emet-truth. O You who call out the end from the beginning, take account of all the generations of the people that have never ceased seeking You. / Pray, place the countless songs I sing to You before You. Let my cry and prayer draw nigh unto You. / Let the praise I reflect back to You be a crown on Your head, and my prayer rise up as incense before You. / Let the song of the forlorn people be precious in Your eyes, like the song sung over Your offerings.

Let my blessings rise up to the crown of the One who sustains, conceives, and gives birth [to all]. He is the invincible righteous One. / nod Your approval to my blessings, and take them as an offering of the purest spices. / May my meditation be pleasing to You, for my soul yearns [and calls out] for You alone. / Yours, Hashem, is the loving greatness, the power, the beauty, the dominance, and the empathy, for all that is in heaven and earth. Yours, Hashem, is the kingdom and the absolute sovereignty over all! Who can put into words [the greatness of] Hashem's mighty acts, or utter all His praise?

"They envisioned You as an ancient sage and as a young warrior, with the hair of Your head at times white [as snow] and at others as black [as that of a raven]."

Based on the Zohar,101 the Ari explains that these two prophetic images (of a young warrior with dark hair, and an ancient-of-days with white hair) represent two different modes of divine providence—the first is called Zeir Anpin (literally “diminished face,” and known also as reward-and-punishment, measure-for-measure, divine justice, the school of accountability), and the other is Atik Yomin (Ancient of Days).102

Israel envisioned the former at the Red Sea, and the latter at Sinai. Daniel also referred to the latter when he said, “As I looked, I saw thrones being placed, and the Ancient of Days

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102 Shaar HaKavanot, Drushey Chag HaShavuot, Drush Aleph.
did sit. His garment was as white as snow, and the hair of his head was like pure wool” (Daniel 7:9).

The white hair of an ancient grandfather represents Hashem’s attribute of pure mercy, whereas the dark hair of a warrior represents His attribute of justice. As above, these two attributes involve the dynamic between Hashem’s desire to bestow His love on all His creatures unconditionally (mercy), on the one hand, and His desire that we deserve this love (justice), on the other hand. As Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan taught: 103

On the level of Keter [i.e., Atik Yomin], God’s mercy is unmitigated and pure. Like a grandfather, His desire is to bestow the greatest good irrespective of how deserving His grandchildren are. For their own good, however, He constricts His mercy through the smaller partzuf of Zeir Anpin and thereby, like a parent, makes His giving dependent on His children’s merit. These two modes of giving do not contradict one another. They both emanate from God’s love for all His creatures.

The Transformation from Justice to Mercy

With these introductory remarks, we can now attempt to understand the metamorphosis (i.e., transformation from justice to mercy) that Hashem enacted right in front of Moshe’s eyes:

"Vayaavor YKVK al panav—
Hashem passed over (overruled/overcame) His face
[i.e., His attribute of justice]. . .” (Exodus 34:6).

Because of the multiple meanings involved (in this context the word "panav" means his face, His face, and His anger), the phrase can be translated in three complementary ways:

(1) Hashem passed over his (Moshe’s) face.
(2) Hashem passed over (i.e., transformed) His own face.
(3) Hashem passed over (overruled/overcame) His attribute of justice, which is anthropomorphically described as His anger. 104

The second and third translations are based on the following passage in the Talmud, in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: 105

Rabbi Yochanan said: If it were not written in the Tanakh, it would be impossible to say. But we are taught that Hashem appeared [to Moshe in prophetic vision as an Ancient of Days] wrapped in a tallit like a shaliach tzibur (prayer leader). [By metamorphosing the face of this Ancient of Days from anger to compassion.] He showed Moshe the order of prayer. He said, “Whenever Israel sins, let them enact (yaasu) this order (i.e., this metamorphosis) before Me, and I will forgive them.”

Hashem showed Moshe a vision of Atik Yomin (Ancient of Days) transforming His face and overcoming His anger in order to teach Moshe and Israel how to obtain complete

103 Innerspace, p. 103.
104 In the context of the thirteen attributes of mercy having been revealed precisely after the sin of the golden calf, it means, “He overcame His anger over Israel’s failure to pass such a crucial test which would have allowed it to re-attain the level of Adam before eating of the Tree of Knowing/Joining Good and Evil.”
105 Rosh Hashanah 17b.
Days of Awe—Yod-Gimel Midot

atonement, even for a transgression as serious as worshiping the golden calf. The Maharal explains:\footnote{Maharal, Chidushei Aggadot Aleph, p. 115.}

The sages are bothered by the phrase, “Vayaavor Hashem al panav vayikra” (Exodus 34:6) [which can be read to mean that Hashem passed over His own face and called out the thirteen attributes of mercy]. If Hashem had just wanted to teach Moshe how to pray, He could have taught him the way He taught him the rest of the Torah. Why did He have to “yaavor al panav” (pass over His face, i.e., enact a metamorphosis)?

Rather, this teaches us [as the Talmud states] that He showed Moshe [in a prophetic vision] the order of prayer [i.e., the process of transformation that must take place in man, in order that Hashem, too, will transform His attribute of justice by awakening His thirteen attributes of mercy and compassion].

Again, the verse in the Tanakh to which Rabbi Yochanan refers is, “As I looked, I saw thrones being placed, and the Ancient of Days did sit. His garment was as white as snow, and the hair of his head was like pure wool” (Daniel 7:9). The Ari says that this is alluded to here on Mount Sinai in the words, “Hashem lowered His presence in a cloud (anan),”\footnote{Sefer HaLikutim, parashat Ki Tissa.} indicating that the vision of the white tallit materialized before Moshe in the form of a white cloud.\footnote{Clalim Rishonim, clal 1, clal 23.}

Maharsha adds that he found the following in an ancient kabbalistic text: “The Holy One enveloped Himself in the same white tallit that He used when He created the world, as the verse says (Psalm 104:2), ‘You wrap Yourself in light like a garment; you spread the heavens like a curtain.’”\footnote{Shir HaShirim Rabbah 4:22; Pesikta d’Rav Kahana, piska 22, ot heh.}

Rabbi Chaim Friedlander also emphasizes the importance of self-transformation implied here. Quoting the Ramchal,\footnote{Siftey Chayim, Moadim Aleph, pp. 171-172.} he first explains that the garment of light with which Hashem enveloped Himself is none other than the system of midot-sefirot (the different modes of divine providence) which He created in order to govern the world. This is the meaning of the Midrash, “The Holy One dressed up in ten garments and created the world.”\footnote{Siftey Chayim, Moadim Aleph, pp. 171-172.}

Rabbi Friedlander then quotes an extremely important oral tradition concerning the Yod-Gimel Midot. On the commandment “ye’elekhet be’hol derakhav—you shall walk in all His ways” (Deuteronomy 11:22), the Sifri comments:

These (yod-gimel midot) are the ways of the Holy One, as it is written, “YKVK, YKVK, Kel rachum vechanun, erekh apayim verav chesed ve’emet; notzer chesed la’alafim; nosei avon vafesha vechataah venakei” (Exodus 34:6-7). It is also written by the prophet Yoel, “Kol asher yikra b’shem YKVK yimalet—all who call in the Name of Hashem will be saved” (Joel 3:5). But how is it possible for a person to be called by the Name of the Holy One? [The Midrash has made a not-so-subtle switch from yikra-call to yikarei-be called.] Rather, just as He is called rachum ve’chanun, so you too should be rachum ve’chanun...

Rabbi Friedlander comments:\footnote{Siftey Chayim, Moadim Aleph, pp. 171-172.} In the original verse in Yoel, we are told to call out in Hashem’s Name, and yet the sages felt justified in changing the meaning to being called by His Name. Why did they do this? They are teaching us here that calling out in the Name of
God means not only learning about His midot-attributes. Rather, only by adapting those same attributes and literally dressing up in them just as He does, only thus can we too become worthy of being called by those very attributes.

**What Is Prophetic Vision?**

Returning to Rabbi Yochanan, we must delve deeper into the process by which Hashem appeared as shaliach tzibur (prayer leader). We need to find what is behind such a statement. What does it mean to see a vision of Hashem?

First, it is important to emphasize the obvious: Hashem has no form or body. Therefore when we read that “Hashem appeared as such-and-such or such-and-such,” it is clear that the words are referring to prophetic vision. But what is prophetic vision? R. Aryeh Kaplan z”l dealt with this beautifully:111

Essentially, every other prophet except Moshe saw himself; he saw his own mind... When every other prophet has an experience of God, his “dream center” is going to produce an image. If the dream center relates to God as a person, the image he sees will be that of a person.112 In addition, the face of the image will be his own, since it is being interpreted by his own mind...

In the case of Moshe, on the other hand, the prophecy bypassed his dream center. The only exception is when he first heard God’s voice [at the burning bush]. At that point, we are told, it sounded like that of his father. The reason for this is that Moshe was still a novice and his prophecy was therefore on a much lower level.

When Hashem revealed His thirteen attributes of mercy to Moshe on Sinai, he (Moshe) was not a novice. In other words, Moshe’s prophetic experience was definitely not mediated by his dream center like that of the other prophets. Nevertheless, we must not conclude from this that Moshe couldn’t have a prophetic vision. He not only had a prophetic vision, but its degree of clarity was vastly superior to that of other prophets. This is indicated by Hashem’s reprimand to Aharon and Miriam after they doubted the correctness of Moshe’s separating from his wife: “Listen now to My words: If one among you experiences a prophecy of YKVK, I make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. This is not true of My servant Moshe...with whom I speak face to face, in a vision not containing allegory, so that he sees a true picture of YKVK” (Numbers 12:6-8).

We see here that Moshe was clearly able to see a vision when Hashem wanted him to see one.

**Torah and Prayer as One**

Based on this, we can now understand the built-in ambiguity we referred to above. Recall that, based on the image of the shaliach tzibur metamorphosing his face from anger to compassion, we conjectured that Hashem called out His name and His attributes a number of times, each time exhorting Moshe to do the same, until they were both calling out in unison.

This is really so deep. The sin of the golden calf is an archetypal sin. That is, it involves a tension between two major elements that are present in any sin: God’s plan or His

111 Innerspace, pp. 135-137.
112 Tikuney Zohar, tikun 18, p. 31b.
foreknowledge, and man’s free will. Because it is an archetypal sin, however, this tension is amplified here a million-fold. On the one hand, precisely because it occurred a mere forty days after the revelation at Sinai (when three million people were lifted up to the heights of prophetic consciousness), Bnei Yisrael were much more culpable than under normal circumstances. On the other hand, the magnitude of the test was such that they would have had to be superhuman to overcome it. The sages of the Talmud (who held an extremely radical theology) even suggest that it was all a setup: ”David was tested with Batsheva in order to teach teshuvah to the individual. Bnei Yisrael were tested with the golden calf in order to teach teshuvah to the community.”

The revelation of the Yod-Gimel Midot HaRachamim in the wake of our teshuvah for having worshiped the golden calf is thus also archetypal. The revelation of this extremely high level of mercy precisely at this point in the story is laden with cosmic implications for all of us. Here, despite or perhaps because of the awesome gravity of the sin, Hashem revealed this level of mercy in response to our teshuvah. The implications: He will do the same for us. Whatever we have done—however much we have pushed Him out of our lives—He will take us back and bring us closer than ever before if only we will do teshuvah.

And what is this teshuvah? Of course it involves the four basic elements that must be present in all teshuvah: sincere regret for having done wrong, viduy (confession, coming clean) before Hashem, resolving not to repeat the wrong, and a desire to change one’s ways for the better. Of these four, the first three are necessary to rectify the spiritual damage that results from sin. Regret rectifies thought (corresponding to neshamah), viduy rectifies speech (corresponding to ruach), and resolve rectifies action (corresponding to nefesh). The fourth element, the desire to change one’s ways for the better, involves wanting to use the same faculties with which we sinned to do good.

Here, in order to reveal heaven’s response to our teshuvah (which is normally hidden from our eyes), we are shown a movie. We see Moshe standing before a shining apparition of an Ancient of Days, ”His garment white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool” (Daniel 7:9).

But wait. Moshe too is dressed in white and has a long white beard. Indeed, if we were standing there, and if we could see Moshe as well as what he was seeing, we might see two identical figures, literally two Moshes. At first, they would be facing each other. But as one of them calls out the Ineffable Name, followed by the other, over and over again, something very powerful happens. The two figures begin to merge into one. Is it Moshe calling out or the Ancient of Days? Is it the Ancient of Days calling out, or Moshe?

Although this sounds quite radical at first, it is really the deeper, archetypal reality behind all prayer. Didn’t Hashem say to Moshe at the burning bush, ”Who gives man a mouth, or who can make a person dumb or deaf? Who gives a person sight, or who makes him blind?” (Exodus 4:11). When the Torah states, ”vayaavor Hashem... vayikra—Hashem passed over...and He/he called out,” it is not only talking about Hashem calling out followed by Moshe. It is telling us that Hashem called out through Moshe. That Moshe’s calling out is Hashem’s calling out through him.

113 As per Rabbi Akiva’s famous statement: “All is foreseen, yet free choice is granted” (Pirkey Avot 3:15).
114 As above, the test had to be of such magnitude that it would be equivalent to the test of Adam and Eve in Gan Eden. If Israel would then overcome it, this would usher in the ultimate Redemption. I discuss this in depth in my Spiritual Technology.
115 Avodah Zarah 4b.
116 We repeat again: It is significant that there are specifically thirteen attributes of mercy. The number thirteen embodies perfectly the hidden presence of oneness behind all plurality.
By extension, it is also telling us: Pay attention when you speak, especially when you speak words of Hashem’s Torah which themselves have become incorporated into the prayers, and have become transformed in the process from Torah to prayer.\textsuperscript{117} As recorded in the name of the Baal Shem Tov: “When you speak, do not think that it is you who speaks. Rather, it is the lifeforce of the Blessed Creator within you that speaks through you. [When you become aware of this,] you elevate speech up to its source in divinity.”\textsuperscript{118}

This is exactly what Avraham did when “vayikra sham Avram beshem Adonai—Avram called out there in the name of Hashem” (Genesis 13:4). In the Midrash and Talmud, we are told that Avraham’s calling out in the name of Hashem means that he taught Torah.\textsuperscript{119} In another place, we are told that Torah is like pure water from a well. It is for this reason that all the patriarchs established schools of Torah wherever they dug a well and found water in the desert. Precisely in those places where water would flow from below, they would channel spiritual water (prophetic Torah) from above.\textsuperscript{120}

But then, Onkelos translates “vayikra sham Avram beshem Adonai” as “vetzali taman Avram beshema d’Adonai—and Avram prayed there in the name of Hashem.” We thus see that Avraham’s calling out in the name of Hashem means that he gathered students and showed them how to pray.

The two are one and the same. Torah is a revelation of God’s will from above. Prayer is our wanting what God wants from below. At first, Avraham channeled Torah from above, and then turned to God and prayed for the very things that God was revealing through him. In prayer, he aligned his will below with God’s will above.

At a later stage, Avraham entered into such a deep level of prophecy that channeling Torah from above and praying to Hashem from below became one. In that highly attuned state, that is, he broke through the illusion of duality. There is only divine Oneness. He realized, in other words, that on the deepest level of existence, our entire ability to think, speak, act, and exist is coming from Hashem. This is why calling out in the name of Hashem is so deep. It is here that we overcome the illusion of duality in the most perfect way possible.

Now just as one simple word—vayikra—has two complementary meanings in connection with Avraham, the same is true regarding Moshe and us. Our entire ability to think, speak, acting, and existing are magnified a billion times over. This is the perfect merging of God and man that the Torah is alluding to.

**Before the Sin and After the Sin**

“Hashem passed over (transformed) His own face and called out: YKVK, YKVK...”

\textsuperscript{117} This is not just an isolated case. Throughout our prayers, we constantly quote verses from the Torah. Indeed, major sections of our prayers are direct quotes from the written or oral Torah (korbanot, ketoret, ezehu mekoman). The entire Shma Yisrael is Torah made into prayer. Torah is God speaking to us, while prayer is our speaking to God. What we fail to register and appreciate is that, in quoting Torah when praying, something very deep happens: the aspect of Hashem’s light that is within us is calling out and connecting to the aspect of Hashem’s light that transcends us. The two become one. And although this unity must be hidden in order for the world to exist, still, on the inside level of our souls, we cannot exist down in this world without it. This is what we are trying to point out here.

\textsuperscript{118} Baal Shem Tov al HaTorah, Lekh Lekha §16; Tzavat HaRivash §127.

\textsuperscript{119} Bereshit Rabbah 39:16, Sotah 10a-b.

\textsuperscript{120} Berakhot 56b.
The Talmud distinguishes between the two YKVKs in this verse, but in a hidden way. On the same page where we read what Rabbi Yoichanan said, immediately following his statement, the Talmud there quotes our verse, “YKVK/Hashem, YKVK/Hashem,” and explains that the two Havayahs teach us something profound about Hashem’s relationship to us: “I am He (i.e., the same) before a person sins, and I am He (i.e., the same) after a person sins—as long as He returns in teshuvah.”

At first sight, it seems that Hashem is saying that He is the same before and after we sin. All we need to do is return in teshuvah, and we can reestablish the same relationship we had before the sin. But it’s not so simple. We turn to Rabbi Joseph Soloveltschik. He begins by asking:

What is the significance of the double repetition of the term Havayah, which, as the Talmud states, means “before man sins and after”?

When man sins, he creates a distance between himself and God, and becomes, in Maimonides’ words, “separated from Hashem, the God of Israel, as it is written (Isaiah 59:2), ‘your iniquities have separated between you and your God.’” The end result of sinning is the driving out, as it were, of the Holy Presence. But who then will take care of the sinner after the Holy One removes Himself, and the sinner is left alone? Who will help him to cut himself off from his sins and escape their contamination? Who will lead him back home to his Heavenly Father? Who will extend a helping hand to rescue him from the quicksand into which he has sunk?

...Who is it that extends a hand to the sinner and stretches forth his right arm to receive penitents? What is the internal voice that seizes hold of the sinner and draws him away from sin? From whence the voice within his conscience that calls him to “Return!” if the Holy One blessed-be-He has rejected him and is far removed from him as a result of his sins?

...“YKVK, YKVK.” Two times the Ineffable Name is mentioned. The first removes Himself from the sinner, abandons him. But the second, the aspect of divinity that is there with man after he sins, remains. The Holy One (Zeir Anpin) departs, for it can have no part with the world of sin. But the Shekhinah still remains.

"And he (the Cohen Gadol) shall make atonement for the defilement of the bnei Yisrael... ve’khen yaaseh le’ohel moed ha’shokhen itam betokh tumotam—so too shall he do for the tent of meeting that dwells with them in the midst of their defilement.” The Shekhinah never departs completely from any Jew, no matter how far he has gone or how deep he has become immersed in sin. God is there after man sins. He remains hidden in the inner recesses of the heart of even the worst evildoer until the moment arrives when he remembers his Maker and renounces his ways and repents...

The God who is there before man sins closes the gates after man has sinned. The sinner becomes cut off, cast far away. But is he cut off forever more? Definitely not! He can still cry out to God who is there after man sins. The second Havayah is ready to listen

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121 Rosh Hashanah 17b.
122 Peli, On Repentance, pp. 94-97.
123 Hilkhot Teshuvah 7:7.
124 In the Zohar (1:52b), the “tent of meeting” (ohel moed) is said to be a code-name for the Shekhinah. In addition, based on the verb ha’shokhen (dwell), Rashi adds here, “even when they are defiled, the Shekhinah (indwelling presence) is with them.”
even after the first has shut the gates through which man must pass to stand before his Maker...

But on Yom Kippur, the Cohen Gadol would say the Ineffable Name **three** times. Why? First to arouse the sinners to repent and confess, which can occur only in the wake of the Name of God who is there after man sins...Then, however, “On this day, He will atone for you, to cleanse you from all your wrongdoings; before Hashem you shall be cleansed!” (Leviticus 16:30). When the Ineffable Name was pronounced for the **third** time, after the cleansing, man could again find himself “before Hashem,” as he is allowed once again to approach Him who is there before he has sinned...In Maimonides’ words, “he is now beloved, desired, close at hand, a friend.”

We see now that the Talmud’s statement is precise, “I am the same before a man sins and I am the same after he sins—**as long as he returns in teshuvah**.” Without this last phrase, we would think that our relationship with Hashem is the same before and after the sin. This is not true. Until we return in **teshuvah**, the first **Havayah**, which parallels the Tree of Life, is lost to us. We are cut off. It is only with the help of the second **Havayah**, which parallels the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil, and represents Hashem being with us even in our defilement, that the possibility exists of returning. At that point, it all depends on us. Does it mean enough to us to try to make amends? Do we believe the **nachash** (serpent, snake, sneak) when it whispers in our ears, “it’s too late; you’re cut off!” or do we struggle to come back? It is only after we return to Hashem in sincere **teshuvah** that our original relationship can be reestablished on a higher level.

Here then is an alternate translation-paraphrase that combines what we have said with some of the deeper meaning embedded in the thirteen attributes themselves:

Hashem appeared in prophetic vision to Moshe as an Ancient Sage wrapped in His prayer shawl. He seemed to be praying, and literally transforming an angry face into one filled with mercy. Moshe understood that Hashem was teaching him something extremely profound about the way He conducts His world, especially the way He relates to Israel. Moshe understood that he was to enact this transformation within himself. He also heard Hashem calling out His own Merciful Name, ”Hashem! Hashem!” When he heard the first Name, he was transported beyond this world. He saw the Tree of Life in the Heavenly Garden of Eden. He saw that everything that happens in this world originates in the infinite mercies of the **Ein Sof**. He then heard the second Name, and understood that Hashem is with us even in our brokenness. . .He heard Hashem proclaiming His own attributes of mercy.

Moshe then fell on his face and called out: Hashem (You mercifully sustain us every moment of our lives)! Hashem (You mercifully sustain us even after we have done wrong so that we can repent and return to You on a more mature level than before)! Loving God, You sustain everything with love. Even Your punishment is merciful and for our own good. You are gracious even to those who are undeserving. You patiently await our repentance and are slow to anger. You bestow Your love abundantly and yet truthfully in accord with our behavior. You safeguard the good deeds of the great-grandparents for thousands of generations. If we repent, You forgive us for having rationalized our sins. You even forgive us for our rebellion against You. You forgive us all the more so for our errors. You cleanse us and completely release us from our past if we repent (Exodus 34:5-7).

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125 Hilkhot Teshuvah 7:6.
Zeir Anpin and Atik Yomin
But there is yet another incredibly important lesson embedded here as well. Our key verse reads:

יְהֹוָה : וַיַּעֲבֹר יְהֹוָה עַל פָּנָיו וַיִּקְרָא

Hashem passed over (transformed) His own face and called out: YKVK

According to the halakhah, when we pray the Yod-Gimel Midot, it is important to make a full stop between the two Havayahs that precede them. This is based on the fact that a vertical line called a pasek [a trope sign equivalent to an English exclamation point] separates between the two Havayahs. The halakhah emphasizes the importance of accentuating this pasek.126

This is consistent with the tradition that, as a result of the archetypal sin of the golden calf, we lost the exalted "garden of Eden" "before the sin" "tree of life" relationship that had been renewed when we agreed to receive the Torah at Sinai.127 Instead, like Adam and Eve after the sin, we were vouchsafed a "fallen" "tree of knowing good and evil" relationship.

Above, we learned from Rabbi Yochanan that Hashem showed Moshe a vision of Atik Yomin (Ancient of Days) transforming His face and overcoming His anger in order to teach Moshe and Israel how to obtain complete atonement, even for a transgression as serious as worshiping the golden calf.

The Zohar says the same thing, but in slightly more complicated language. According to the Zohar, the din-judgment of Zeir Anpin (the measure-for-measure mode of divine providence that interacts with us on the basis of our actions) flared up as a result of the sin.

This is the meaning of “I have seen this people, and behold it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore leave Me (i.e., do not try to stop Me) when I unleash My wrath against them to destroy them!” (32:10).128

Moshe’s greatness lay in his ability to draw illumination down from the higher mode of Atik Yomin (the mercy of Keter) into the lower mode of Zeir Anpin (the mode of justice). According to this, the transforming of the face that Moshe saw was nothing less than Atik Yomin flowing down into Zeir Anpin, softening and sweetening it. This is what the Torah means when it records the following interaction:

Moshe began to plead before Hashem his God. He said, “Hashem, why unleash Your wrath against Your people whom you brought forth from Mitzrayim with great power and a show of force? ...Remember Your servants, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yisrael. You swore to them by Your very essence and declared that, “I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the firmament…” Hashem regretted the evil that He said He would mete out to His people (Exodus 32:11-14).

126 Ben Ish Chai, Ki Tissa 12.
127 When we stood at Sinai and proclaimed “naaseh ve’nishma—we will do and we will obey” (Exodus 24:7) in response to God’s offer to give us the Torah, we re-attained the level of Adam before the sin. At that moment, we received two spiritual “crowns” (edi’im), one for naaseh and one for nishma (Shabbat 88a). With this, we became free of the contamination of the nachash (serpent) which had distorted mankind’s ability to grasp the truth of God’s existence ever since Adam was banished from Eden (Shabbat 146a; Zohar Ki Tissa, 2:188b). We also overcame the Angel of Death (Shemot Rabbah 32:1). For the first time since Adam, we were free men, i.e., we had overcome the illusion and woken up from the dream of this-world.
In the *Kitvei HaAri*, we read further about the two Havayahs [YKVK, YKVK] that precede the enumeration of the thirteen attributes of mercy. In *Shaar Maamarey Rashbi* the Ari informs us that the first Havayah represents Atik Yomin (the mode of mercy), while the second represents Zeir Anpin (the mode of justice, the system of accountability). In *Shaar HaKavanot* he says the opposite: the first Havayah corresponds to Zeir Anpin while the second Havayah corresponds to Atik Yomin.

Again, in one place the Ari speaks in terms of "from above-to-below," and in the other place he speaks in terms of "from below-to-above." From above-to-below corresponds to Atik Yomin (the mercy of Keter) looking down and having its unconditional love and mercy overcome the requirements of strict justice of Zeir Anpin (the system of accountability). "From below-to-above" corresponds to Zeir Anpin (the mode of justice, the system of accountability) looking up, so to speak, and asking for the illumination of Atik Yomin (the mode of mercy) to flow down upon and sweeten it.

This aligns perfectly with what Rabbi Yochanan taught in another place in the Talmud:

Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Yossi ben Zimra: How do we know that the Holy One prays? It is written, "I will bring them to My holy mountain and I will cause them to rejoice in *beit tefillati* [the Temple of My prayer]. Their elevation-offerings and peace-offerings will be accepted favorably upon My altar. For My House shall be called a House of Prayer for all mankind" (Isaiah 56:7). The verse does not say *beit tefillatam* (the Temple of their prayer), but *beit tefillati* (the Temple of My prayer). We thus see that the Holy One prays.

And what is His prayer (from above-to-below)? Rabbi Zutra bar Tuvia said in the name of Rav: It is, "May it be My Will that My compassion *yikbosh* [overcome, overrule, dominate] My anger, and that My compassion *yigol* [prevail over, sweeten, transform] My [more judgmental] attributes. May I act toward My children with the attribute of mercy, and may I be lenient with them [by not judging them solely according to the requirements of strict justice]."

We have received a tradition: Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha [Cohen Gadol] said, "Once I entered into the Holy of Holies to offer the incense [on Yom Kippur] and I beheld a vision of [God embodied in the sefirotic array] Akatriel (Keter) Kah (Chokhmah-Binah) YKVK (Chesed-Gevurah-Tiferet) Tzevakot (Netzach-Hod-Yesod-Malkhut). [Similar to Yeshaya, Yechezkel, and Daniel, I envisioned Him as a king] enthroned upon a high and exalted throne.

"He said to me, ‘Yishmael, my son, bless Me!’ I said to Him (from below-to-above), "May it be Your Will that Your compassion overcome Your anger, and that Your compassion prevail over Your [more judgmental] attributes. May You act toward Your children with the attribute of mercy, and be lenient with them [by not judging them solely according to the requirements of strict justice].’ He nodded His head [as if to say, Amen].” We learn from here to never underestimate the blessing of even the simplest person.

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129 Shaar Maamarey Rashbi, p. 45d.
130 Shaar Hakavanot, drush aleph d’vayaavor, p. 43b.
131 Berakhot 7a.
Systems within Systems

Now, lest we fall into the trap of thinking that Zeir Anpin and Atik Yomin are two distinct modes, we have Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai’s emphatic statements in the Zohar:

כלא כל מילים. четыיקא דעתיקין ועיין אופין כלא דלא.

Klala dkol milin: Atika d’Atikin u’Zeir Anpin kola chaad—the overriding principle behind all that we have said is that the Ancient of Days (the mode of mercy) and the Diminished Face (the mode of justice)—it is all ONE.\(^\text{133}\)

אמר ר' שמעון כלא כל מאלמי דעתיקא קדישא ר' שמעון כל מה דאמינא דזעיר אנפין, שמעון כל מה דאמינא דעתיקא קדישא אמר ר

Rebbi Shimon said: "Kol mah de'amina d’Atika Kadisha vekhol mah de’amina d’Zeir Anpin, kola chaad, kola hu chaad milah—all that I have said concerning the Ancient Holy One (the mode of mercy) and all that I have said concerning the Diminished Face (the mode of justice)—it is all ONE. It is all one unified system."\(^\text{134}\)

The Ari quotes Rabbi Shimon and explains:\(^\text{135}\)

This is understood in the light of what I have explained in numerous places...that [anthropomorphically speaking] Arikh Anpin extends from the uppermost level of Atzilut to its base. The lower partzufim of Abba and Imma, as well as of Zeir Anpin and Nukva, all are subsets of Arikh Anpin [that act as filters for its powerful light]. It follows that all of the lower partzufim of Atzilut are included within that overall partzuf of Atika d’Atikin. It is all ONE. The lower partzufim are merely garments for those that tower above them.

From the bottom-looking-up, Zeir Anpin might seem to be a separate mode of divine providence, God forbid. However, from the top-looking-down, Zeir Anpin is a subsystem that is included within the larger partzuf of Atik Yomin / Arikh Anpin, through which the powerful light of Ein Sof is reduced (diminished, limited, tailored) in order to create the possibility of free will and accountability.

The secret is to be able to stand down here in this world, and yet begin to intuit the behind-the-scenes reality that is Hashem’s point of view from above.

Again, this means that as much as we are subject to the requirements of justice, this is merely a subsystem within Hashem’s overriding plan for creation. What is this overriding plan? It involves a perfect Infinite Being bringing into existence an imperfect finite creation that seems to contradict His perfection, and then creating an imperfect creature (man) to whom He entrusts the impossible mission of bringing everything back to perfection but who seems to make everything worse, until he (man) grasps what’s really going on and turns to the Perfect Creator to reveal His perfection into the system of creation above and beyond what he (man) is capable of doing on his own.

As we said above in the context of the word vaet’chanan, this is not meant to imply that man gives up and throws in the towel. No, rather it is a function of consciousness, an awareness of his place in the larger plan that empowers him to do that which is far beyond his own capacity to do.

\(^\text{133}\) Zohar Idra Raba, 3:141, bottom.
\(^\text{134}\) Zohar Idra Zuta, 3:290b.
\(^\text{135}\) Shaar Maamarey Rashbi, p. 45d.
Of course there is a paradox here, a Catch 22. Life on this planet is designed (by the Designer) in such a way that man, on his own, is incapable of doing anything on his own. Yet, the moment he grasps this, man overcomes the paradox.

**Systems within Systems within Systems**

- **Kutzo shel Yod, Adam Kadmon, Keter, Arikh Anpin, Yechidah**
- **Yod, Atzilut, Chokhmah, Abba, Chayah**
- **Heh, Beriah, Binah, Imma, Neshamah**
- **Vav, Yetzirah, 6 Sefirot, Zahir Anpin, Ruach**
- **Heh, Asiyah, Malkhut, Nukva, Nefesh**
His dependence on the higher power is no longer seen as a blow to his ego, but as a manifestation of his exaltedness.

The more we grasp this—that our greatness lies in our ability to connect to the Source of existence—the more we will want to fulfill our part in the great overriding plan. How do we fulfill our part? By our actions!

This plan will culminate in the revelation of the Source into the system of creation, the return of the creation back into the Source, and the paradoxical revelation that nothing exists except the Source. Indeed, the extent that we grasp this will determine how successful we are in aligning ourselves with the plan. It is all a function of consciousness.

In the terminology of the Torah, this is the meaning of the phrase “YKVK Hu haElokim.” This is a statement and a prayer. It means that we are asking for Hashem (YKVK) to reveal His mercy into the system of justice (haElokim). Ultimately, as we see again and again, this is the dynamic behind all our prayers.

In the terminology coined by Ramchal, we realize clearly that hanhagat ha’mishpat (the mode of justice, the system of accountability) is a subset within hanhagat ha’ahavah (the mode of unconditional love) and hanhagat ha’yichud (the ultimate purpose for the universe: the revelation of God’s oneness). Like Rabbi Yishmael, the Cohen Gadol, we pray to be instrumental in revealing the light of God’s true unity and love into the seemingly impenetrable concealment of this-world.

We realize that olam hazeh (this-world) is a subset within Olam Haba (the World-to-Come), and we thus pray that olam hazeh become irradiated with the awesome illumination of Olam Haba. What does all this mean to us now? We can think of it as a never-ending series of paradigm shifts. Perhaps we can picture ourselves climbing higher and higher up a great mountain range. At each stage we look back down and see greater expanses of the mountains and valleys below. Eventually we see an entire township at the foot of the mountain within the greater context of which it is a part.

In terms of the spiritual dimension, it means that the higher we go, each seemingly distinct universe or dimension through which we pass becomes revealed as a part within a greater whole, ad infinitum. The higher we go, the dimensions become more comprehensive and all-inclusive of all that is below them. And the higher we go, the more we encounter complete and absolute unity. From these high plateaus the plurality that we experienced below is seen as an extension and an actualization of all that is contained within the Higher Unity in potential. What seemed at a lower level to be a distinct dimension is now revealed at the higher level to be merely a part within a greater whole.

The same dynamic is true of the levels of soul. From the bottom-up, nefesh seems to exist on its own. After all, it is that aspect of the soul that is most connected with and identified with the body. The body thus exerts a tremendous power over the nefesh. On its own the nefesh has almost no chance of overcoming the lures of the physical, not that these are intrinsically evil, but that that is just not what the nefesh is supposed to do. On the contrary, the nefesh must refine itself by overcoming the pull of the lower passions. The only way it can do this is to connect to its higher source, ruach. And this goes on all the way up to yechidah.

From the top-down, the view is quite different. Yechidah, the highest level of the soul, contains all the lower levels (chayah, neshamah, ruach, nefesh) within itself in potential.
Yechidah then births chayah (which contains all the levels below it in potential). Chayah births neshamah (which contains ruach and nefesh in potential), etc.

Why? Why does it have to be like this? And what difference does it make for us when we are able to make the paradigm shift and see all the lower levels as subsets within the higher level? By reading the following text carefully, we can be closer than ever to the answer:136

The entire reality of this world is organized around the principle of neshamah ve’guf (soul and body), ohr ve’kli (light and vessel), tzurah ve’chomer (spiritual form and physical matter), elyon ve’tachton (upper and lower), penimi ve’chitzon (internal and external). The soul/light level always governs the existence of the body/vessel level.

How does the soul/light level govern the body/vessel level?

While the essence of the soul level remains above, it beams a projection of itself down below into the body. This projection enters into the body level, and serves there as its [indwelling] soul. It is then—via that beam of its own light that it projects—that the body draws its life-force and its existence from above, for as long as this is decreed.

Now from its position above [but via its projection within the body], the soul constantly works on the body. Not for a single moment does the soul leave the body without activity [but rather it pushes and compels it to grow and develop to its full potential]. For the soul’s job is to rectify its junior physical counterpart below, so that it may eventually return it to itself above.

Where does this body/vessel level of reality come from?

Before the lower material aspect descended below, it too existed within its soul level above, included within it. It is just that its inclusion then was in implicate potential. It was thus in order to bring it forth into full existence and allow its qualities to unfold from potential to actual [that this entire process was activated].

This condition of soul above and body below will not continue forever:

Thus, after it will have reached completion, the soul will return its lower counterpart to itself to gain even greater perfection. It will then attain the purpose for which it was brought forth into existence, which is none other than to ascend forever from one high level to the level above it, ad infinitum.

But not only the body gains.

It is a privilege, an elevation, and a great fixing for the soul itself when it has bestowed of its perfection on the body. Indeed, they were both created for this purpose, namely, that the body be completed by its soul. This then is a great elevation for the soul when it completes the work it was sent to complete.

It is an elevation for the soul for it too is a body/vessel relative to the soul/light levels that tower above it.

136 R. Shlomo Elyashiv, Leshem Shvo VeAchlamah, Hakdamot VeShearim, Shaar Beit, perek beit (end), p. 16; see above note #67.
Only then may both of them rise up ever higher to delight and rejoice in the light of the presence of the Infinite One blessed-be-He, and to merge and become one in the light of His holiness in the final tikun (rectification), as was His intention in creating the entire world.

What was God’s Intention in creating this imperfect world with so many sublevels? It was in order to give us a chance to participate in bringing all these levels back to Him.
APPENDIX

The Divine Names in Psalm 130

Based on all we have learned above, we can now return to Psalm 130 and understand its use of different divine names. In a key passage in the Zohar, we read the following:

We have learned: A person is judged on a number of levels, both during his/her lifetime and after they pass over into the spiritual dimension. All heavenly judgment is with compassion. The Holy One is filled with compassion for all His creatures, so much so that He does not wish to judge us according to our deeds. This is what King David meant when he said, "If You, Yah, were always to take account of intentional transgressions, O God [Adonai], who could withstand [the severity of Your judgment]?"

But precisely here, we must stop and ask. After saying "If You, Yah, were to always take account of our sins," [it would have been enough to conclude, "Who could withstand?"] Why then did he add the divine name Adonai?

In order to understand the Zohar’s question, we must first define these two divine names:

As we saw above, the Name Yah (which we pronounce Kah when not praying) is spelled Yod-Heh and is the divine name that is usually associated with the sefirah of Chokhmah. Sometimes (on a more micro-level) the Yod itself is said to correspond to Chokhmah, while the Heh corresponds to Binah. There is no contradiction for it is known that Binah is included in potential within Chokhmah.

Second, the name Adonai-Lord (which we pronounce Adanat-Lordship when we are not praying) is usually associated with the tenth sefirah, Malkhut, which is the lower mode of divine providence called Shekhinah.

Seeing that Chokhmah and Binah are far above Malkhut, and therefore (based on the rule that "the higher up you go, the greater the compassion") far more compassionate, why would King David write this verse in a way that implies the opposite?

Rather, King David mentioned three levels of compassion here [not just two]. First, "If, You, Kah, were to always take account of sins" refers to a situation in which our transgressions have multiplied to such an extent that they have risen up to the level of Chokhmah/Abba and Binah/Imma [of the dimension of Beriah]. [As a result, they are
powerless to atone for our transgressions.] [We must therefore turn to the level immediately above them.] This is why the name Adanut is mentioned here.

In Shaar HaKavanot, Rabbi Chayim Vital writes in the name of the Ari that the divine name Adan can be seen here as the level of Arikh Anpin / Keter of Beriah; alternatively, once such a distinction has been made, it can be seen as the level of Malkhut of Atzilut which in any case would be considered more compassionate than all that lies below it in Beriah, again, according to the rule that the higher you go, the greater the compassion.

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If even this name (Adan), though it be filled with compassion, be aroused to judgment, and, as a result, all channels of compassion are clogged, one exalted level remains to which we can return (i.e., which will surely take our desire to return in teshuvah into consideration). It is from this exalted level that all healing comes forth. It will surely have pity on us. For what is this exalted level called? It is called Mi.

Mi, whose gematria is fifty [mem = 40, yod = 10], corresponds to the Fifty Gates of Binah of Atzilut. As we saw above, Binah / Imma / Teshuvah / Mi / Olam Haba transcends the laws of this world (the school of accountability) which require that we suffer the consequences of our actions. If we could only see our lives from the point of view of Olam Haba—from the point of view of Eternity—we could appreciate the incredible opportunity we are given by being given here. With that flash of binah—understanding, we could then return in wholehearted teshuvah, and be healed.

Based on this, our verse can now be read as a statement as opposed to a question: “If Yah were to take full account of our intentional transgressions, [and even] Adonai [would sit in judgment against us], Mi will still stand up for us.” [Alternatively: aroused by our teshuvah from below, Binah d’Atzilut will be stand up above to sweeten the judgments of Arikh Anpin d’Beriah that arose due to our sins, and it will become filled with compassion for us.] Similarly it is written, “For your breach / rift / fracture is wider than the sea, who can heal it?” (Lamentations 2:13) [which can be re-read as “Though your breach / rift / fracture be as wide as the sea, still (if you return in teshuvah from below), Mi will arouse compassion from above and surely heal it”]. We now understand why the first two names (Kah and Adan) are mentioned. For even if the wellsprings of their compassion are closed off as a result of our sins, Mi will stand up for us. For through it all pathways of teshuvah and compassion are opened.

In other words, we always have recourse to Hashem’s mercy at higher and higher levels. As we saw above, “Mi’mamaamik keratikha Hashem” means that the more real and sincere our heartfelt call to Hashem, the more He will come forth out of His infinite concealment and reveal His presence to us. Truly His mercies are never exhausted.

138 Inyan kavanat chazarat ha’amidah, s.v. ve’da ki zeh hashem d’adanat, p. 41b.
About the Author

Avraham Sutton is an Orthodox Torah mentor, teacher, and author. For over 30 years he has been learning and teaching prophetic Torah, kabbalah, talmud, midrash, chassidut, prayer and meditation, and sacred song. He has translated, edited and/or authored over 20 major works in English on the deeper significance of Torah for our age.

Born in 1949 in Los Angeles to Syrian Sefardic parents, he attended the University of California (U.C.L.A., Berkeley, Santa Cruz), graduating in 1972 with a major in “Communication” (which included the History of Religion and Mythology, History of Consciousness, and the Psychology of Dreams and the Soul). In 1974, after spending the next two years in Los Angeles rediscovering his Jewish roots, he traveled to Israel to study Torah in a yeshivah for the first time. This was the beginning of an intense 11-year period during which he married and began raising a family, and learned from and bonded with some of the great teachers of Jerusalem.

(1974-1975) Dvar Yerushlayim (Jerusalem), Rabbi Baruch Horowitz
(1975-1977) Mikdash Melech (New York), Rabbi Chayim Benoliel
(1977-1980) Ohr Sameach (Givat Ada, Jerusalem) and
(1980-1981) Nachiel (Migdal HaEmek), Rabbi Nachman Bulman z”l
(1981-1985) HaChayim VeHaShalom—Israeli Rabbinical and Kabbalistic Yeshivah (Jerusalem), Rabbi Eliyahu Attieh and Rabbi Mordechai Attieh

Following this, from 1985-1990, he was the head of English research and development for Arachim Seminars in Israel, and the sole researcher, translator, and editor of Pathways to the Torah, the official sourcebook used in Arachim and Discovery Seminars worldwide. During this time he edited and updated Survival—Israel and Mankind by Rabbi Raphael Eisenberg (posthumously, with the author’s widow), which has since been translated into French, Russian, and most recently Hebrew.

He compiled, edited, and annotated Innerspace—Introduction to Kabbalah, Meditation and Prophecy from transcripts of classes given by the late Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan. Since its publication in 1990, Innerspace continues to be considered one of the finest introductions to authentic Jewish mysticism in the English language. Subsequently, he edited the second volume of Rabbi Kaplan’s celebrated Handbook of Jewish Thought.

He was also co-author of a unique website, The 2001 Principle (www.2001principle.net), dedicated to bridging the gap between the Torah and the most advanced theories of science. His own website (www.AvrahamSutton.com)—which features his Torah teachings in written, audio, and video format—is dedicated to raising consciousness about the relationship between personal and collective redemption, and how these two levels of redemption go hand in hand. Personal redemption involves the potential that each and every human has to develop a personal relationship with the Creator. Collective redemption involves the final awakening of Israel and Mankind to its highest calling. The relationship between these two permeates his teaching and his writing.

In 1995, Sutton began learning from Rabbi Shmuel Darzi z”l, one of the last great mekubalim of Yerushalayim. In the eleven-year period during which he prayed and learned with Rav Darzi, his teaching and writing were catapulted to a completely new level. Under the Rav’s auspices, he taught a weekly class in the teachings of the Leshem Shvo VeAchlamah (of Rabbi Shlomo Elyashiv z”l) in the Rav’s synagogue on Rechov Rashi in Makor Barukh for seven years. He was also given permission to translate more and more of the secret teachings of Torah that our generation needs in order to grasp what is required of us—individually and collectively—at this crucial time.
Published Translations and Editing Projects
(2010) **Pirkey Avot** (Ethics of the Fathers), based on the teachings of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, translated & annotated by David Sears, edited by A. Sutton (Breslov Research Institute).
(1998) **Anatomy of the Soul** (on the spiritual significance of every aspect of the human anatomy), Chaim Kramer and A. Sutton (Breslov Research Institute). *Anatomy* has since been translated into Hebrew.
(1991) **Survival—Israel and Mankind**, by Rafael Eisenberg, edited and updated by Mrs. I. Eisenberg and A. Sutton (Targum/Feldheim). *Survival* has since been translated into Russian, French, and Hebrew.
(1985-1990) **Pathways to the Torah**—researcher, translator, and editor of 7 editions.

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In honor of our beloved Teacher and Master, Rav Shmuel Darzi ben Yitzchak zt"l (may the memory of the righteous be for a blessing forever), who passed away during Minchah, at the highest moment of Shabbat, on the 23rd of Kislev 5766. Rav Darzi had so much and he gave so much. He was the center of my life for 10 years, the one to whom I could ask almost any question. Now Rav Darzi and Rav Kaduri zt"l are together with all their illustrious teachers—especially the Masters, the Ari, the Rashash, and the Ben Ish Chai—whose paths they embodied so beautifully and faithfully. And their passing at this time is not by chance. Momentous events are transpiring all around us—all in preparation for the final Geulah. The world is poised to see very heavy things happen. This is what they both lived for. Now we know that this is what they died for. They were mosser nefesh for Clal Yisrael. They are upstairs now pleading for the Geulah, just as they pleaded for us during their sojourns down here on earth. What a privilege it was to pray with the Rav at the Kotel! I never saw anybody like Rav Darzi who knew what to do and what to say when the Aron haKodesh was opened. He showed us all how to pour our hearts out in supplication before our Father in Heaven. He would pray with such realness, such power, and such joy. His smile radiated strength. Barukh Elokenu sh'bera'anu likhvodo ("Blessed is our God for whose honor we were created!") he would always say. When we were with him, we didn't have to "believe" in the Geulah. The Geulah was a fact. He lived it. We will never forget the light of his Torah, the light of his smile, those amazing eyes that beamed with knowledge, life and joy and hope. May the memory of the righteous be for a blessing forever, amen.