

# The Path To Follow

Vayeilech

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## DAYS OF TESHUVAH AND ATONEMENT

**T**he Rambam wrote, “The very aspect of Yom Kippur atones for penitents, for it is written: ‘For on this day he shall make atonement for you’ [Vayikra 16:30]” (Hilchot Teshuvah 1:3). This is surprising, for if the text had actually said, “For this day atones,” we would understand that it is Yom Kippur itself which atones for sin. Yet because it actually states, “For on this day he shall make atonement for you,” this indicates that the Holy One, blessed be He, forgives those who repent on Yom Kippur. Therefore why say that it is the day itself which atones? We also need to understand the meaning of the expression, “For on this day he shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you from all your sins. Before Hashem you shall be clean.” Since the verse states, “For on this day he shall make atonement for you” before stating, “Before Hashem you shall be clean,” it seems that Hashem atones for the Children of Israel before they repent and are cleansed. The verse should have stated, “For before Hashem you shall be clean, and on this day he shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you from all your sins.” The Sages have said, ‘And you shall afflict your souls in the ninth’ [Vayikra 23:32]. Yet does one fast on the ninth? Do we not fast on the tenth? Instead, it indicates that if a person eats and drinks on the ninth, Scripture considers him to have fasted on the ninth and the tenth” (Yoma 81b). I have heard the following question: Why have the Sages said that a person who eats on the ninth is like one who has fasted on the ninth and the tenth, since fasting on the tenth is commanded by the Torah? If they wish to say that eating on the ninth is like fasting on the ninth, they should have said: “One who eats and drinks on the ninth, Scripture considers him to have fasted on the ninth,” since in any case he will fast on the tenth!

We may explain this in light of the verse, “Return, O Israel, towards Hashem your G-d, for you have stumbled in your iniquity. Take words with you and return to Hashem” (Hosea 14:2-3). Why does the verse first say “towards Hashem,” but then says “to Hashem”? Why also the expression, “Take words with you”? We must explain this according to what our Sages have said (Sifrei, Devarim 306), namely that these words are none other than words of Torah, as it is written: “These words Hashem spoke to your entire assembly” (Devarim 5:19). This verse is saying that although a person may repent of his evil deeds, his teshuvah is not genuine teshuvah until he starts learning Torah without going back to his sins. One without the other is impossible, for if he studies Torah without repenting of his sins, he will die without repenting. Yet if he repents without studying Torah, he will eventually return to his sins, for there is nothing more powerful in the fight against sin than words of Torah. This is why the prophet examines what the mitzvah of teshuvah consists of: At first the sinner must stop sinning and regret his sins. This is what constitutes, “Return, O Israel, towards Hashem” – towards Him without having actually reached Him, for it is not complete teshuvah. When does a person reach G-d and attain complete teshuvah? It is when he takes words with him, these being words of Torah. At that point he returns to Hashem, for the fact that he studies Torah constitutes an assurance that

he will not return to his sins, since the Torah is a shield against the evil inclination. As King David said, “Turn from evil and do good” (Tehillim 34:15) – first turn from evil, and then do good. The essence of teshuvah thus consists of Torah study, for one who repents without studying will transgress many serious Torah prohibitions without realizing it, since he has never studied. Hence after doing teshuvah, a person must immediately start learning Torah in order to know what is permitted and forbidden. In regards to this subject, we read in the Shulchan Aruch: “Those who are vigilant begin...as soon as Yom Kippur ends, in order to proceed from one mitzvah to another” (Rema, Orach Chaim 624:5). Since they have repented and regretted their sins on Yom Kippur, they immediately go and study Torah and fulfill mitzvot in order to sin no more. Hence it is not written, “For this day atones,” but rather: “For on this day he shall make atonement for you.” We may have thought that since Yom Kippur itself procures atonement, a person’s repentance will be accepted even if he does not study Torah after Yom Kippur. However the verse states, “For on this day he shall make atonement for you” – the day atones for one who seeks atonement, but not for one who does not seek atonement. In order to prevent us from thinking that “this day atones” even if a person has not resolved to do anything, the verse states: “For on this day he shall make atonement for you.”

Although our Sages have taught, “Rabbi said: ‘For all transgressions of the Torah, whether he repented or not, Yom Kippur brings atonement’ ” (Shevuot 13a), the point is that teshuvah is one thing, while atonement is another. Teshuvah consists of repenting of one’s sins, whereas atonement consists of Hashem erasing them, rendering them non-existent. Rashi explains: “I am of the opinion that whenever the word kaparah is used in association with iniquity and sin...it always signifies erasing and removing. It is an Aramaic expression occurring frequently in the Talmud... In Biblical Hebrew as well, the bowls of the Sanctuary are called kippurei zahav [Ezra 1:10], for the kohen wiped his hands on them” (Rashi on Bereshith 32:21).

Hashem neither atones nor erases sin before the person himself demonstrates his desire to erase them. When Yom Kippur has passed and a person begins to study Torah, perform mitzvot, and distance himself from sin, then it is clear that he wants to erase all the sins he has committed, and so Hashem will erase them. That is why it is written, “For on this day he shall make atonement for you,” not that the day itself procures atonement. The Torah is saying: On this day, reflect upon the fact that Hashem will forgive you tomorrow when you study Torah and abandon sin. If you conduct yourself in this way, He will fulfill what is written in the Torah: “to cleanse you from all your sins. Before Hashem you shall be clean.” He will not do this, however, before you have abandoned sin and started to learn Torah. You must not be content on simply repenting. Your teshuvah will not be considered genuine unless you start to do what you committed yourself to doing on the day after Yom Kippur. In fact the Ba’alei Mussar have said that Yom Kippur does not really begin until after Yom Kippur.

### And Now, Write This Song for Yourselves

The mitzvah to write a Sefer Torah is intended for people to study from it, as it is written: “And now, write this song for yourselves and teach it to the Children of Israel. Place it in their mouth” (Devarim 31:19). It is for this reason that the Torah was given to Israel, to study from it (Rosh, Hilchot Sefer Torah, and Responsa Noda B’Yehuda). There is tremendous sanctity in studying from a Sefer Torah, and a person who reads from a handwritten sefer in sanctity cannot be compared to one who reads from a printed book (Rav Palagi, Yafeh LaLev). Although the writing is but a conduit for studying Torah, it is considered as a mitzvah in itself. This is contrary to other mitzvot, whose essence lies in fulfilling them, and for which preparation is not considered a mitzvah. Why is this so? It is in order to make the Torah available and accessible to every Jew in such a way as to allow a person to constantly read from it, not having to go elsewhere to obtain a book for study. In this way, the ability to study will be within everyone’s reach. We will learn to revere Hashem, and we will fully understand the mitzvot, which are more precious than gold.

This is why even someone who has inherited a Sefer Torah has the mitzvah to write a new one for himself, so that there will always be an abundance of these books. They can therefore be lent to people who do not have the means to purchase a Sefer Torah for themselves. In this way, numerous people will be able to immerse themselves in the study of Torah, and its knowledge will spread.

Furthermore, by writing a Sefer Torah for everyone, we can study from new books, which makes learning more enjoyable. Our learning will not be encumbered by having to study from books handed down to us from previous generations, so old that reading from them tires the reader, for the soul is amazed and the mind expands when studying from a beautiful and pleasant book. The soul’s joy and the pleasure that accompanies reading a fine book are conducive to learning, like the soul infusing new life into the body.

– Sefer HaChinuch and Introduction to the Responsa of Rabbi Akiva Eiger

### The Duty to Protect the Torah

It is written, “Be strong and courageous, for you shall come with this people to the land” (Devarim 31:7).

The gaon Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky, who served as the head of the Vaad HaYeshivot in Eretz Israel, was invited to a state commission dealing with army exemptions for yeshiva students. During the discussions, one minister turned to him in astonishment and said: “Don’t you think that the duty to defend the state comes before protecting the Torah?”

Rav Abramsky explained, “What Hashem said to Joshua, the first to conquer the land, proves the opposite. He gave Joshua two orders before he entered the land: One was to conquer the land, and the other was to protect the Torah. Regarding the first, it is written: ‘Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land’ [Joshua 1:6]. In the second He said: ‘Only be very strong and courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the Torah’ [v.7]. The term ‘very’ is added in the second order, teaching us that the duty to protect the Torah is primary!”

### Best-Suited for Protecting the Torah

It is written, “Moshe wrote this Torah and gave it to the Kohanim, the sons of Levi, the bearers of the Ark of the covenant of Hashem” (Devarim 31:9).

Commenting on the end of Parsha Ki Tavo (Devarim 29:3), Rashi states that the Children of Israel complained that Moshe had given the Torah to the Levites, his own tribe. The Children of Israel were afraid that one day the Levites would say to them, “It was not given to you, but only to us.” Why exactly was it given to them? It is also difficult to understand the meaning

of the expression, “the bearers of the Ark of the covenant of Hashem.” The gaon Rabbi Aryeh Zeev Gurwitz Zatzal, the Rosh Yeshiva of Gateshead, explains why the Sages noted that Korach was among those who carried the Ark. Korach believed that Moshe was working the Children of Israel beyond their abilities. Hence the objection could be raised that he was among the bearers of the Ark, meaning that he knew that the Ark carried its bearers. In that case, how could he claim that the mitzvot of the Torah were a burden for the Jewish people? It was not they who carried the Torah; it was the Torah that carried them!

This is why Moshe entrusted the Torah precisely to the tribe of Levi, for they were “the bearers of the Ark of the covenant of Hashem,” meaning they understood that the Ark carried those who carried it. Above all, they were committed to protecting it at all costs. Moshe knew that the Jewish people must carry the Torah and protect it even during difficult times, under edicts of persecution and annihilation. Hence he realized that the Levites were best-suited for protecting it at all times.

### Why the Children?

It is written, “Gather together the people – the men, the women, and the small children, and your stranger who is in your cities – so that they will hear and so that they will learn, and they shall fear Hashem your G-d and be careful to perform all the words of this Torah” (Devarim 31:12).

The Gemara states, “If the men came to learn, and the women came to hear, why did the children come? In order to reward those who bring them” (Chagigah 3a). Many people are surprised by this, for it’s either one thing or the other: If there is a practical purpose for bringing the children, what other reason is needed? And if there is no practical purpose, then why reward those who bring them? Does one receive a reward for simply bringing a burden? The author of Netivot HaMishpat, the gaon Rabbi Yaakov of Lissa, writes that there is obviously a reason for this mitzvah. Yet just as with many other Torah mitzvot, we are not aware of the reason. The entire question raised by the Gemara focuses on why the order was given in regards to the children, since when all the men and women travel to Jerusalem, it is obvious that they will not leave their children at home alone. In other words, they will bring their children with them in any case. The Gemara replies that it was for this reason that the Torah specifically commands the children to be brought, namely for the act of bringing them to be considered a mitzvah, and for the parents to be rewarded for it.

– Nachalat Yaakov

### Continual Fear

It is written, “They shall learn to fear Hashem your G-d all the days” (Devarim 31:13).

Rabbi Avraham Dov Kahana Shapira, the author of Devar Avraham, explains that every living being, even the simplest creature, does not do anything that would harm it. How so? In each living being is a natural tendency that we term “instinct,” a tendency that pushes it to defend and protect its own life. Humans also have this ability to defend themselves, an ability that operates through the sensation of fear. When a person guards himself from sin and adds fences to his fences, always evaluating his actions, then being cautious becomes natural for him. Thus when he senses the presence of danger, he will distance himself from it. As for a person who does not possess a fear of Heaven, he will easily fall into the traps of the evil inclination, something that can easily happen when we do not have this natural ability to protect ourselves.

The verse is therefore saying, “Fear Hashem your G-d all the days” – the fear of Hashem is not a singular event, but something that fills man with a natural tendency to sense danger. It enables him to distance himself from the deadly traps that are hidden from his eyes “all the days.”

### How Can a Person Not Fear?

The book Chayei Adam states, “A great man died, and a very powerful voice was heard in the Celestial Court: ‘Make way for a tzaddik who has just died.’ As he was being welcomed with great honors, a Sefer Torah was placed in his hands and he was asked: ‘Have you observed what is written inside?’ He said yes. ‘Have you fulfilled the first mitzvah, which is to have children for the sake of Heaven?’ He said yes. He was asked, ‘Who testifies for you?’ At that point the angels created by the mitzvot he had performed, countless in number, appeared and testified for him. One said, ‘I was created by this mitzvah,’ while another said, ‘I was created by that mitzvah.’ Next, the Tur was brought before him and he was asked: ‘Did you fulfill the Oral Torah?’ He said yes. He was asked, ‘Who testifies for you?’ More angels arrived like the first. He was then asked, ‘Were you careful not to use G-d’s Name in vain?’ At that point he was silent. He was again asked, but he kept quiet and said nothing. Witnesses were called, and legions of angels dressed in black came to testify. One said, ‘I was created on such-and-such a day, when he uttered such-and-such a Name unintentionally.’ Other angels said the same. The entire Celestial Court tore their garment, and I tore mine too. They said, ‘Putrid drop, how could you not fear?’ The verdict was that he go to Gehinnom or be reincarnated. He chose Gehinnom.”

The book Chayei Adam ends its account by stating, “How can a person not pay attention to pronouncing G-d’s Name with fear and great concentration?”

### Your Eyes Shall Behold Your Teacher

#### The Sha’agat Aryeh

Before being named as the Rav of Metz, the Sha’agat Aryeh served as the Rav of Volozhin, where he earned a very meager salary. His poverty was so severe, in fact, that at one point his wife had to find work as a baker’s assistant to knead bread. She earned just a few cents, and the Sha’agat Aryeh himself owned but a single suit, which he wore during the week as well as on Shabbat. He left Volozhin because of his poverty, for the city was unable to increase his salary by even half a gold coin. He wandered in various cities and provinces until he was named as the Rav of Metz. In Metz, the custom was that the new Rav would invite the city’s leading figures and Torah sages to his home for coffee. On the day before, the Rebbetzin would be provided with all she would need for the gathering: Coffee, milk, sugar, and all the necessary utensils. The Rebbetzin oversaw everything so that it would be ready for the guests.

Thus the city’s leading figures and Torah scholars arrived at the home of the Sha’agat Aryeh, and the Rebbetzin offered each of them a cup of coffee. Once the guests began drinking it, however, they realized that it was missing sugar. Yet since each guest thought that just his own cup was missing sugar, not the cups of others, nobody said a word.

Imagine everyone’s surprise when they saw that after the coffee was finished, and their empty cups were removed, the Rebbetzin placed a full bowl of sugar on the table!

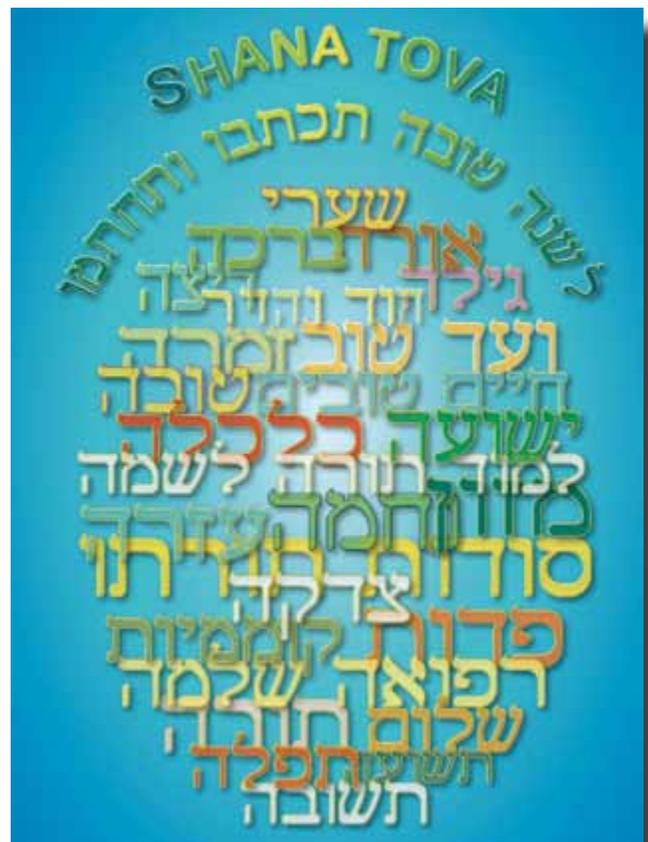
As it turned out, the Rebbetzin was completely unaware that coffee is to be served with sugar. In fact she thought that they were two separate dishes, and that the bowl of sugar was to be served on its own. She apologized when she learned of her mistake, for in Volozhin she had never seen coffee or sugar, either mixed or separated.

– Makor Baruch

### The Day of Judgment

For the Musaf service of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Rabbi Amnon of Mayence introduced the prayer: “Angels will hasten, trembling and terror will seize them, and they will say: ‘Behold, it is the day of judgment, to muster the heavenly host for judgment!’ ” This requires an explanation, for people fear the day of judgment, since they have sinned and do not know if they will be judged innocent or not. Yet why do the ministering angels fear and tremble on the day of judgment, since they have not committed any sins? Our Sages have said, “Whoever performs one precept in this world, it precedes him in the World to Come, as it is said: ‘Your righteousness shall go before you’ [Isaiah 58:8]. Whoever commits one transgression in this world, it clings to him and precedes him on the day of judgment, as it is said: ‘The caravans are turned aside from their course. They enter the waste and perish’ [Job 6:18]” (Sotah 3b). The Zohar teaches that if a man performs a mitzvah in this world, he thereby creates an angel who will defend him in the World to Come, one who will take his side in the future, as it is written: “If there will be for someone but a single defending angel out of a thousand to declare a man’s righteousness on his behalf” (Job 33:23). Conversely, if a person commits a sin in this world, he thereby creates an evil angel who will accuse him in the future, on the day of judgment.

The Sages have also said, “HaSatan has a numerical value of 364, meaning that on 364 days [of the year] he has permission to accuse, but on Yom Kippur he has no permission to accuse” (Yoma 20a). Although the Satan has no permission to accuse on that day, the angels of destruction created by a person’s sins are present, and they can accuse. What does Hashem do? He places great fear upon these angels, and they are so terrified that they cannot open their mouths to accuse. These are the angels that Rabbi Amnon is speaking of: All of a sudden, great fear seizes them and they cannot accuse the Jewish people.



### The Mitzvah of Hakhel

It is written, “Hakhel [Gather together] the people – the men, the women, and the small children, and your stranger who is in your cities – so that they will hear and so that they will learn, and they shall fear Hashem your G-d and be careful to perform all the words of this Torah” (Devarim 31:12).

The Gemara states, “If the men came to learn, and the women came to hear, why did the children come? In order to reward those who bring them” (Chagigah 3a). The gaon Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner Zatzal explains the reasoning behind the mitzvah of Hakhel as follows: One who observes what the Rambam states in the laws of Hakhel will find that the reason for this mitzvah is to re-enact the giving of the Torah on Sinai. The Rambam states that people must “prepare their hearts and set their ears to listening, to hear in fear and awe and joy, in trembling, as on the day it was given at Sinai.... We must consider that day as the very day that we received and that we heard from Hashem” (Hilchot Chagigah 3:6). The mitzvah of Hakhel as it was accomplished during the time of Ezra is a type of the giving of the Torah on Sinai. We can now understand why there is a special duty to bring our children, for in this way it will resemble the giving of the Torah on Sinai, in which all the children participated. That is why the reward is precisely for “those who bring them,” since bringing children completes the perfection of the mitzvah by creating a situation that resembles the giving of the Torah on Sinai. As such, we can also understand what the Rambam wrote: “It is the king who will read in their ears. .... From where will he read? From the beginning of the book of Devarim until the end of the Shema, and then he skips to Vehaya im shamo'a, and then he skips to asser te'asser and reads from there until the end of the blessings and curses, until the words ‘in addition to the covenant that He made with them in Horev,’ and then he stops” (Hilchot Chagigah 3:3). The words “and then he stops,” by which the Rambam concludes, seem unnecessary, since he has already listed all the passages that the king must read. It is therefore obvious that everything omitted is not read. Yet in that case, why does the Rambam feel the need to say “and then he stops”?

Since the reading ends with the verse, “the covenant that He made with them in Horev” (Devarim 28:69), the Rambam specifies “and then he stops” in order to teach us that special meaning is associated with stopping at that point. If the king were to continue reading, he would ruin the objective of the entire mitzvah, for it is precisely by ending with a verse dealing with the giving of the Torah on Sinai that its objective is underlined, namely that it should serve as an example of the giving of the Torah.

### The Torah on a Single Foot

A person approached Rabbi Akiva and said to him, “Rabbi, teach me the entire Torah all at once!” He replied, “My son, if Moshe Rabbeinu spent forty days and forty nights on the mountain in order to learn it, can you expect to learn it all at once? I will teach you a great principle of the Torah: What you would not want others to do to you, do not do to others. If you want no one to wrong you, do not wrong others. If you want no one to take what belongs to you, do not take what belongs to others.”

This person left and went to find his friends, and they ventured into a field that was filled with wheat. One of his friends took an ear of wheat, while his other friend took another. He, however, took nothing. They found another field that was filled with cabbage, and again his two friends took some, while he took nothing. They said to him, “Why haven’t you taken anything?” He replied, “Rabbi Akiva taught me: ‘What you would not want others to do to you, do not do to others. If you want no one to wrong you, do not wrong others. If you want no one to take what belongs to you, do not take what belongs to others.’”

Hillel the elder stood at the entrance of Jerusalem as people were going out to work. He asked them, “How much will you earn today?” One person replied, “One dinar.” Another said, “Two dinarim.” He said to them, “What will you do with this money?” They answered, “We need it to live.” He said to them, “Do you not want to come and inherit the Torah and the life of this world and that of the World to Come?” Hillel did this all his days, until he gathered them under the wings of Heaven.

### Guard Your Tongue!

#### He Cannot be Trusted

The evil inclination, which tries to compel a person into accepting Lashon Harah as the truth, comes to a person and attempts to seduce him by asking: “How could you even suspect that the speaker said something that was not true,” or “How could the speaker add to his comments and violate the prohibition, ‘Distance yourself from falsehood’ [Shemot 23:7]?” One must respond, “Better that I should reject what the speaker said and suspect that he was lying about this person, than I should believe him.” If you had seen the speaker wearing shatnez or cutting off the hair of his sideburns or shaving his beard with a razor, and he came to you with some story, saying that a friend said something detrimental about you, then you would certainly not believe him. You would say, “Leave me alone. I don’t believe a word you’re saying!” If this person does not care about violating the Torah, then he would definitely lie. Likewise in this case: Even if the speaker’s comments are true, the one who accepts his Lashon Harah violates the Torah commandment: “You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people” [Vayikra 19:16]. It is an extremely grave sin! Even if the comments are true, the one who speaks Lashon Harah violates the Torah according to all authorities. The speaker is then suspected of fabricating this account in its entirety, or at least of inserting his own lies into the account and completely changing the circumstances of what actually happened from beginning to end.

– Shmirat HaLashon, Sha’ar HaZechirah, Ch. 12