


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש


Friday 3 October 2014 - 9 Tishrei 5775
Yom Kippur

DAY OF REPENTANCE, ATONEMENT AND JOY

THIS SHABBAT IS YOM KIPPUR, THE DAY OF ATONEMENT. A special feeling of spirituality is in the air. The dominant theme is Repentance, being aware of past errors and seeking self-improvement. At the same time, especially since this year Yom Kippur is on Shabbat, there is also a joyful atmosphere. How can these apparent opposites of Repentance and joy be combined?

In fact, according to Chassidic teaching, Yom Kippur should *always* be joyful, even when it does not fall on Shabbat. True, this is a serious day, when we fast; but it is also a day of inner spiritual cleansing and rejuvenation. Hence it is called the Day of Atonement, of forgiveness. In practice it is a day when a person can achieve a beautiful sense of release and purification.

First, let us consider the concept of Repentance itself. Chassidic teaching informs us that there are two varieties of Repentance. The first is called ‘Lower Repentance’, and it consists of regret for one’s transgressions and positive decisions to be more careful in the future. This form of Repentance relates to awe of G-d and has a predominantly serious quality.

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|  | Dedicated by Dr Jutta Singer תחיל In Memory of her Mother Leah bas Freidel ע"ה Erev Yom Kippur 5721 (1960) |
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The second is called 'Upper Repentance' and expresses a deep inner turning towards G-d, a quest for greater closeness with Him. It is expressed by intense, intimate prayer and Torah study. This form of Repentance relates to love of G-d and is characterised by joy¹.

During the days leading up to Yom Kippur, there may well be a serious mood of Lower Repentance. A person might remember how he offended someone, some months ago. Or was it some years ago? Perhaps a phone call, or an email, would help to put things right...

However on Yom Kippur itself one enters a higher mode. The atmosphere is joyful and has the positive mood of the Upper Repentance. We remember our sins, and even recite long lists of them - but there is also joy. It is the Day of Atonement when these sins are being washed away, or even in some sense, transformed.

The Talmud describes this, near the end of the volume which discusses Yom Kippur. It quotes a third century Rabbi named Shimon the son of Lakish, who himself was a former gladiator, or even a bandit, who became a Talmudic Sage. Rabbi Shimon says: 'great is Repentance, because it transforms deliberate sins to accidental sins'.

When you think of it, this itself is a remarkable transformation. But this is the effect of only a lower level of Repentance, Repentance from Fear. Rabbi Shimon goes further: through Repentance from Love, one achieves an even higher level: 'Great is Repentance, for it transforms deliberate sins into positive good deeds!'²

One way of understanding this, is that the positive energy generated by one's Repentance is so great that it leads to many good deeds. The good is, paradoxically, the outcome of the sin...

This may not be easy to achieve in every instance. But what we can *all* experience on Yom Kippur, is a sense of release and purification. On this day each individual draws very close to G-d, as if he or she were personally entering the Holy of Holies, like the High Priest. This closeness to G-d brings a unique feeling of purity, freedom and joy. Hence the traditional greeting when you meet someone on Yom Kippur is: *Good Yom Tov!*

1. See Rabbi Shneur Zalman's *Tanya*, Letter on Repentance, chs.8-9. 2. Tractate Yoma, 86b.

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YOM KIPPUR

FASTING AND FORGIVING

Mrs. Klein was in the middle of stirring the pot of rice she was making for supper when the front door burst open and Sara and Naomi, her nine year old twins, burst in.

"Mommy!" they shouted excitedly at the same time and threw their arms around their mother's neck.

"Hi girls," Mrs. Klein said, hugging them close. "How are my new Year Four girls doing?" The twins beamed. "School's so much fun, Mommy," Sara told her, eyes glowing. "Our teachers are so nice." "Yeah, especially Miss Silverstein. She's the best one!" Naomi added.

"And why is she the best one?" Mrs. Klein asked, starting to stir the rice again. "Because she teaches us about all the Jewish holidays! And it's so interesting," Naomi said.

"Today she told us about Yom Kippur," Sara said importantly. "And that we can't wear leather shoes and that after Bat Mitzva, or even a bit before, we will have to fast."

"And we pray the whole day in Shul," Naomi chimed in. "We ask G-d to forgive us for all our sins from this past year. Or even from last year..."

"I hope He'll forgive me for everything I did. I know I did a lot of bad stuff this year..." Sara looked worried.

“Don’t worry, dear.” Mrs. Klein patted her daughter’s head. “You’ll be forgiven for all of them. G-d knows we’re human and He also knows that we can make mistakes.”

Sara looked relieved.

“But there’s one thing I don’t understand,” Naomi said, her brow furrowed. “Someone asked Miss Silverstein but I couldn’t understand the answer. We all know people have to fast on Yom Kippur. But why? What’s the connection between not eating and being forgiven for all our sins?”

“That’s a good question Naomi,” her mother smiled. Then she thought for a few moments. “By not eating, we are showing G-d that we are giving up personal enjoyment. That’s also why we can’t take a shower or even put on any creams or makeup. It’s like an offering to G-d. We are trying to show G-d that we really mean what we’re saying in the prayers, and that we really want to be forgiven for our sins.”

“That’s interesting,” Naomi mused. “But what Miss Silberstein said was that we become more spiritual, because we are more close to G-d on Yom Kippur. So when we are more spiritual, we don’t have to eat.”

“That sounds nice,” said her mother. “What’s difficult to understand about that?”

“Well, even the one hour in the morning that I fasted last year was very difficult and I got really hungry...” said Naomi. “So what does she mean by saying if you get very spiritual you don’t have to eat?” Then Naomi answered her own question. “I know, maybe, if you get really involved in the prayers and the singing, you just don’t think about eating...”

“Yes,” said Mrs Klein. “And if you are so involved, then surely you will also be forgiven!”

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