

Yom Kippur Essays & Halachot

By
Rabbi Eli J Mansour

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Learning From the Butcher's Mistake

The Gemara (Yoma 87a) tells that the great sage Rav was once insulted by the local butcher. Over the next several months, Rav waited for the butcher to apologize, but he never did.

Finally, on Erev Yom Kippur, Rav decided to go and stand right outside the butcher shop so the butcher would see him. He hoped that if he would stand there, and make it very easy and convenient for the butcher to request forgiveness, he would.

The butcher saw Rav standing outside his shop, and he shouted angrily, "I have nothing to say to you!" Not only did he refuse to ask forgiveness, he doubled down, insisting that he had nothing to apologize for.

At that moment, a bone from the animal the butcher was carving darted from the counter into his neck, killing him.

The Rabbis of Mussar explain that although the butcher had offended Rav many months earlier, he was punished only now because he squandered the opportunity to apologize and make amends. All people make mistakes, and it is not easy to admit we were wrong and initiate a process of reconciliation. But what's inexcusable is avoiding reconciliation when the opportunity comes right to our doorstep. The butcher was wrong to offend Rav, and he was wrong for not going to request forgiveness – but what sealed his fate was failing to approach Rav when Rav made himself available.

This story sheds light on a pronouncement by the prophet Yeshayahu about the Aseret Yemeh Teshuba – the ten-day period from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur.

Yeshayahu (55:6) turns to the people and exclaims, "Dirshu Hashem Be'himase'o, Kera'uhu Bi'hyoto Karob" – "Seek out G-d when He is accessible, call upon Him when He is near." Of course, G-d is

always “accessible,” and He is always “near.” In all seasons, at all times of year, and at any time of day, in any circumstance, we can turn to Hashem for help, we can ask Him for forgiveness, and we can ask for whatever it is we need. However, the Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 18a) explains, during the Aseret Yemeh Teshuba, Hashem is especially close, and is especially receptive to our sincere prayers. During this period, the prayers recited by an individual have the same power as prayers recited together with a Minyan during the rest of the year. We can only imagine how powerful congregational prayer is during the Aseret Yemeh Teshuba! Indeed, Rav Chaim Brim of Jerusalem (1922-2002) would say that spiritual achievements which normally take weeks to attain can be reached in just a few moments during the Aseret Yemeh Teshuba. This is a special time, when our prayers and our efforts to repent and improve are particularly effective, many times more than at other times of the year.

At first glance, it seems that Yeshayahu is encouraging us and advising us by calling upon us to turn to Hashem during this period of Aseret Yemeh Teshuba. As Hashem is close, it is recommended that we seize this opportunity for prayer and repentance. But in light of the Gemara’s story about Rav and the butcher, we might conclude that Yeshayahu isn’t just giving advice – he’s issuing a stern warning. If Hashem is close, then we must initiate a process of “reconciliation,” a process of Teshuba. It’s not just a good idea – it’s an obligation.

We are flawed human beings, and so it is understandable that we will make mistakes. We are not expected to be perfect. And, it is understandable that we will find it difficult to acknowledge our mistakes, to admit wrongdoing, to confess that we’ve acted improperly and have made bad choices. This is embarrassing and uncomfortable. And, change is always challenging. But even if we could be excused the rest of the year for not making an effort to improve and ask Hashem for forgiveness, we have no excuse during this week, when Hashem specifically comes to us and invites us back. During the Aseret Yemeh Teshuba, Hashem is right here next to us with His arms open. He is ready to forgive us as long as we take the first step by admitting we were wrong and committing to try harder. If we don’t seize this opportunity, this period when Teshuba is especially accessible, then we have no more excuses.

Let’s ensure not to make the butcher’s mistake. Let’s take full advantage of this special opportunity, and sincerely turn to Hashem in heartfelt prayer and with a firm resolve to improve, to correct our mistakes, and to enhance our relationship with our Father in heaven.

The Two Yom Kippur Goats

During the times of the Bet Ha’mikdash, the Kohen Gadol would offer a special series of sacrifices on Yom Kippur to bring atonement for the people. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the Yom Kippur service was a pair of goats, which were sacrificed in two very different ways. The Kohen Gadol would

cast lots, picking out of a box two pieces of wood, one of which bore the inscription "L'Hashem" ("for G-d"), and the other "La'azazel." He would then place one piece of wood on each goat, determining their fates. The goat designated "L'Hashem" was sacrificed, and its blood was sprinkled in the Kodesh Ha'kodashim – the inner chamber of the Bet Ha'mikdash, where nobody was allowed to enter, except the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur. The other goat, which was designated "La'azazel," was brought several miles outside Jerusalem into the desert, where it was thrown from a cliff.

What is the meaning behind these two goats? Why were two separate goats needed for atonement, and why was one goat "sacrificed" by being killed in the desert?

One answer might be that the two goats correspond to the two basic categories of Misvot in the Torah – our obligations toward Hashem ("Ben Adam La'Makom"), and our obligations to our fellow man ("Ben Adam La'habero"). One goat atoned for sins committed against the Almighty, whereas the other atoned for interpersonal offenses. Indeed, the Talmud teaches that the two goats were to be precisely identical to one another – alluding to the fact that these two areas of Torah are of equal importance. One cannot be considered a devoted Torah Jew if he observes only the ritual laws, between man and G-d, without concern for other people, or if he is kind and generous toward others but neglects his obligations to Hashem. Both elements are equally vital components of Torah life.

The Sa'ir L'Hashem – the goat sacrificed in the Bet Ha'mikdash – clearly corresponds to the area of "Ben Adam La'Makom." Its blood is brought into the Kodesh Ha'kodashim, where no people are present, and the Kohen Gadol stands alone with Hashem. This chamber represents a person's relationship to Hashem, and so this sacrifice atones for sins committed against the Almighty.

The second goat, which was brought out into the desert, atones for the wrongs committed against other people. The explanation might be that this unusual sacrifice alludes to the first incident of fraternal strife among the Jewish Nation – the story of Yosef and his brothers. It was in the desert where the brothers threw Yosef into a pit, essentially casting him from the family ("Ha'bor Ha'zeh Asher Ba'midbar" – Bereshit 37:22). Throwing the goat off the cliff perhaps symbolizes the casting of Yosef into the pit, the first sin "Ben Adam La'habero" that our nation committed, which forms the origin and basis of all subsequent interpersonal offenses.

This association between the Sa'ir La'azazel and the story of Yosef might explain another aspect of the Yom Kippur service. Before the goat was sent out to the desert, a piece of red string was taken and cut into two pieces – one which was then placed between the goat's horns, while the other was hung in the Bet Ha'mikdash. After the goat was thrown off the cliff, the piece of string in the Bet Ha'mikdash would miraculously turn white, symbolizing G-d's forgiveness of the people's sins. The Gemara comments

that this string was to have a very specific value – precisely two silver coins. Not coincidentally, the Gemara elsewhere teaches that Yosef's brothers grew jealous, to the point where they sold him as a slave, because of the special garment that their father made for him, which contained two silver coins' worth of material more than the garments he made for them. The string that was attached to the horns of the "Sair La'azazel" thus reminds us of the pettiness that leads to jealousy and hostility, and can ultimately tear apart families and relationships.

As part of our repentance on Yom Kippur, we are called upon to examine our conduct in both areas of religious life. Alongside our efforts to improve our service of Hashem, we must also consider the way we treat the people around us, in our family, in our school, yeshiva or workplace, in our community, and wherever we interact with other people. Honesty, humility, respect, courtesy, patience and courteousness are no less crucial a part of Torah life than prayer, Torah study, Shabbat, Sisit and Tefillin. It is through the combination of "Ben Adam La'Makom" and "Ben Adam La'habero" that we live complete Torah lives and become worthy of Hashem's unlimited blessings.

Earning Atonement for Theft

Toward the very end of the Yom Kippur service, during the Ne'ila prayer, we describe the special day of Yom Kippur as a day of forgiveness given to us by God, "Le'ma'an Nehdal Me'oshek Yadenu" – "in order that we withhold our hand from theft." Astonishingly, we point specifically to the sin of "Oshek," theft, as the primary, essential purpose of Yom Kippur. After reciting the "Viduy" (confession) several times throughout the day, listing one-by-one all the many sins of which we are guilty, we approach God at the end of Yom Kippur and say, "We want to stop stealing."

How many of us are guilty of theft? Have any of us recently robbed a bank? Why do we point specifically to this sin as the primary offense for which we seek atonement on Yom Kippur?

Some have suggested that, indeed, we are guilty of stealing – from the Almighty. God entrusted each and every one of us with a sacred soul, a divine spark, a part of God Himself. We were each assigned the task of caring for and nurturing the soul, by involving ourselves in Torah and Misvot. In this sense, we have indeed stolen from God. If a person gave us a plant to watch for him, it is understood that we must water it so that it does not wither. But we have failed to "water" the soul, to care for it to make sure it does not wither. Just as muscles break down when they are not worked and used, similarly, the soul breaks down when it goes unused, when it is wasted. This is the primary sin that we are guilty of, and for which we seek atonement. We have ignored our souls, we have not given them the care and nurturing they need. By failing to maximize our potential in Torah study and Misva observance, we have "stolen" our souls from the Almighty.

It is customary to sound a Shofar in the synagogue at the conclusion of the Yom Kippur service. Rav Sadok Hakohen of Lublin explained this practice as an allusion to God's creation of man. As the Torah writes (Bereshit 2:7), God created man by "blowing" a soul into Him. The blowing of the Shofar after Yom Kippur is intended to symbolize the "blowing" of a new soul into the person. It is as though God announces after Yom Kippur, "I have accepted your prayers! I have removed your old, withered soul, and have breathed a new, fresh soul within you!" The sounding of the Shofar is thus symbolic of the fact that we have indeed been forgiven, and have been granted a new soul to look after.

Each year, after Yom Kippur, we are given a new opportunity to prove ourselves worthy of hosting the divine spark, to show that God can now trust us with a soul, with a part of Him. It is thus our responsibility to fulfill our commitment, and to make sure to properly care for and nurture soul, rather than allowing such a precious possession to wither and go to waste.

Starting With Middot

The Rambam (Rabbi Moshe Maimonides, 1135-1204), in Hilchot Teshuba (7:3), alerts us to the fact that repentance is required not only for specific sins that we commit, but also for our negative character traits. He lists traits such as anger, jealousy, gluttony, greed and the pursuit of honor. Unfortunately, when we think of Teshuba, we think only of ritualistic matters such as Shabbat, Kashrut, prayer and the like, all of which are undoubtedly important and integral to Torah life. But we forget something far more basic and elementary – our Middot, our characters. Teshuba is, first and foremost, about character refinement.

This point was developed by the great Kabbalist Rav Haim Vital (1542-1620), in Sha'ar Kedusha. He writes that the "fundamental principle of Judaism" is that we must exercise greater care with regard to our Middot than to observance of the Torah's commands. Needless to say, this does not mean, G-d forbid, that we may neglect the Torah's commands. Rather, it means that we must focus more on improving our character traits than on the other areas of Torah observance. The reason, Rav Haim Vital explains, is that once we have refined our characters, Misva observance will naturally follow. If a person has bad Middot, Rav Haim writes, he cannot be a religious Jew.

In truth, this point was made already by Hazal, in the Gemara. The Gemara teaches that expressing anger is akin to idolatry, and arrogance is akin to heresy. If a person does not have proper character traits, he cannot be considered religious.

In other words, a person can come to pray in the synagogue three times a day, wear several pairs of Tefillin to satisfy every opinion, sway back and forth with his eyes closed throughout a 20-minute Amida, adhere to the strictest standards of Kashrut and spend hours a day learning – but still not be

religious. If he does not speak kindly and patiently to his wife, children and employees, he is not religious. As shocking as it sounds, this was said by Rav Haim Vital, the foremost disciple of the Arizal and one of the greatest Kabbalists of all time.

It is truly a shame that we find this shocking. Today, our minds have been programmed to associate the word “religious” with study and ritual, not with refined character. And so we have Jews who are “religious” but are dishonest in their financial dealings. And we have Jewish drivers with Kippot honking, shouting and cursing at other motorists. We have lost our bearings, as well as our understanding of what it means to be “religious.”

To a large extent, this is a function of the society in which we live. In contemporary American society, people are evaluated based on meaningless, superficial criteria such as their net worth, fame, the type of clothing they wear, and the kind of house they own. They are not evaluated based on their nobility of character. This superficial value system has been carried over to the Jewish community. We, too, evaluate people – including ourselves – based on superficial criteria such as appearance and which Kashrut agencies we trust or don’t trust. We have forgotten that the most important criterion is our Middot, whether we act with dignity, integrity and consideration.

I recall once at a wedding seeing a “religious” fellow push his way through the crowd at the dessert buffet and fill his plate with a huge piece of cake and then adding cookies to cover the empty space that remained, stacking them in a large tower. He then came over to me and asked if I knew whether the dessert was made with “Yashan” flour. This is a perfect example of how our priorities have become skewed. He’s concerned about “Yashan,” but not about pushing past people or about eating without restraint. Of course there’s nothing wrong with enjoying a tasty dessert. But indulgence in physical gratification – even if the food is strictly kosher – is directly at odds with the spirit of Torah life.

Rav Haim Palachi (Turkey, 1788-1869) writes that refining one’s character is the “cure all” remedy for all spiritual ills, and is “a priceless pearl.” There are many areas in which we should endeavor to improve on Yom Kippur, but before anything else, we must focus on our Middot. This is the first and most crucial step that we need to take in an effort to draw closer to Hashem and resemble the Heavenly angels, inching our way ever closer to spiritual perfection.

The Happiest Day of the Year

On the night of Yom Kippur, immediately following Kal Nidreh, we recite as part of our prayer service a verse from the Book of Bamidbar (15:26): “The entire Israelite congregation, and the convert residing in its midst, shall be forgiven – for the entire nation [transgressed] unintentionally” (“Ve’nislach Le’chol Adat Beneh Yisrael Ve’la’ger Ha’gar Be’tocham Ki Le’chol Ha’am Bi’shgaga”).

The question arises, how can we possibly claim "Ki Le'chol Ha'am Bi'shgaga," that all the sins we transgressed over the past year were committed unintentionally? Did we not commit any willful sins the entire year? How can we honestly come before God and demand forgiveness on the grounds that all our sins were accidental?

The Ripple Effect

The day which we normally refer to as "Yom Kippur" is actually called in the Torah by a slightly different name – "Yom Kippurim." The name "Yom Kippur" means "Day of Atonement," whereas "Yom Kippurim" is a plural term, which literally means, "Day of Atonements." The Torah's use of the name "Yom Kippurim" thus gives rise to the question of which "atonements" are referred to. Which different types of atonement are indicated by this name?

One possibility is that the name "Yom Kippurim" refers to the two basic categories of sins – violations "Ben Adam La'Makom" (between man and G-d), and "Ben Adam La'habero" (between a person and his fellow man). On Yom Kippur, we must seek forgiveness for both kinds of infractions – the wrongs we have committed against the Almighty, and the wrongs we have committed against other people.

But there may also be an additional explanation.

The Talmud teaches that on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, G-d opens the "Sifreh Haim" and "Sifreh Metim." These are commonly translated as "the book of life" and "the book of death." Meaning, G-d inscribes in one book the names of those given another year of life, and He inscribes in the second book those who are given the opposite judgment, Heaven forbid.

However, one of the great Sephardic scholars, the Pahad Yishak, explains differently. He writes that on the Days of Awe, G-d judges both the "Haim" – the living – and the "Metim" – the dead. Even those who have already passed on, and are no longer with us in this world, are judged on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

If so, then we can understand the meaning of the term "Yom Kippurim" – "Day of Atonements." Atonement is granted not only to us, to those who are fortunate enough to still be alive, but even to the deceased. For them, too, Yom Kippur is a time of forgiveness and atonement.

This, of course, begs the question, why do the deceased require atonement? For what are they judged now for which they had not already been judged? They were judged once they departed this world,

and, quite obviously, they could no longer perform Mitzvot or commit sins since then. Why, then, are they judged again each year?

The answer is that the “ripple effect” of our actions continues well after we leave this world. The consequences of our behavior, both positive and negative, continue indefinitely.

A devoted teacher educates hundred or thousands of students over the course of his career, inspiring them to follow the Torah, and equipping them to lead a Torah life. Each year, the Mitzvot performed by these students, by their children, and by everyone whom their students and children influenced, are credited to this educator, even many years after his passing. And thus every year, he is judged anew, receiving countless new merits because of the Mitzvot that were performed as a consequence of his hard work and devotion.

The same is true of each and every one of us. Every Mitzva we perform, every kind word we say, every good decision we make, has a ripple effect. It impacts upon the people around us, and they then influence others as a result. We are credited with, and rewarded for, not only the Mitzvot we perform, but also their long-term positive effects, for all eternity.

However, the opposite is also true.

One of the kings of Yehuda was the wicked king Menashe, who did not just worship idols – but worshipped every pagan deity that existed in his time. However, toward the end of his life, he regretted his idolatry, and repented. Curiously, his eventual Teshuva is not mentioned in the Book of Melachim, where we find the primary account of his rule. It is mentioned only in the Book of Dibre Hayamim, which was written much later. During his lifetime, although Menashe repented, the effects of his sinfulness were still widespread and tangible throughout the kingdom. He himself regretted his idolatry, but all the people whom he had influenced to worship idols continued doing so. It was only much later that the impact of his sins began to wane, and thus it was only then that his repentance was worth mentioning.

Each day of our lives, and even every moment, we are planting seeds which will yield plants that will continue reproducing for generations to come. And it is up to us to determine what kind of “plants” will be produced as a result of our actions.

Every piece of Torah we learn, every small Mitzva we perform, every bit of inspiration we experience, has a long-term impact. I still tell my family words of Torah and pieces of wisdom which I heard from

my teachers as a youngster. We need to take advantage of every opportunity we have to learn, to grow, and to perform Misvot, because their value is infinite, lasting for generations.

Let us be mindful of the ripple effect of our Misvot, and make the commitment to pursue every Misva opportunity that we can, and avoid all wrongdoing, so that the seeds we plant will yield beautiful vegetation for the future.

The answer touches upon what is likely the most fundamental question concerning Teshuba. Why is God prepared to erase all our wrongdoing from our record? We understand that He is compassionate and prepared to forgive. But why does He go so far as to erase our sins from memory? It is as though He takes a video recording of our lives and deletes all segments that involve sinful behavior. Indeed, in this same verse, we make reference to "the convert residing in its midst," drawing a comparison to repentance and conversion. Just as Halacha treats a convert as a "newborn child," and his past history prior to his conversion is completely erased, similarly, by performing Teshuva we are able to erase our shameful past. By now most of us probably take this for granted, but if we think about it for a moment, it is mind-boggling. On what basis does God rewrite our history?

The answer is that there is a spark of goodness, of sanctity, deep within the soul of every person. Regardless how far a person has fallen into the abyss of sin, this spark continues to burn; it is inextinguishable.

The Rambam, in a famous ruling, writes that if a recalcitrant husband refuses to give his wife a Halachic divorce, the court (in the times when it had the authority to do so) would beat him until he agreed to grant the divorce. Even though a Halachic divorce requires the will of a husband, a divorce given under this kind of duress is nevertheless valid, the Rambam writes, because in the husband's subconscious, he wants to do the right thing. The Bet Din does not force its will upon the husband, but rather removes the obstruction from the true desire of his heart to do what is proper. Every person's true intent is to do the right thing, but our hearts are sometimes "blocked" by obstructions that we simply need to remove to allow our true will to surface.

As we begin Yom Kippur, it is natural for us to feel discouraged. Why should we bother repenting? Do we even deserve God's attention, let alone His forgiveness? We therefore proclaim, right from the outset, "Ki Le'chol Ha'am Bi'shgaga!" Our true intention is and always has been to do God's will. We have been dissuaded and led astray by our evil inclinations, and our inner spark has been covered over by layers of darkness, but deep inside, we all want to do what is right. All our sins are indeed a "Shegaga," a mistake, a careless swerve off the road. Our real intention is to do only the right thing.

And this is how Hashem can erase our record. Once we find that inner spark of holiness within our souls, it is determined that all our sins were “unintentional,” and can therefore be erased from the “video.”

Our Sages described Yom Kippur as one of the happiest days of the year. We are not despondent or dejected on this day. To the contrary, we are invigorated and inspired by the words that should be ringing in our ears throughout Yom Kippur – “Ki Le’chol Ha’am Bi’shgaga!” Yom Kippur is the day which reminds us that deep inside, we are all good, we are all holy, and therefore God wants us to return to Him. He will not reject sincere prayer and repentance, because He sees that spark inside us which is never extinguished.

Three times a day, in our Amida prayer, we describe Hashem as “Ha’rose Bi’tshuba” – “Who desires [our] repentance.” If there was even a single Jew whose repentance God is not willing to accept, we could not recite this Beracha. The fact that we recite it proves that God desires the Teshuba of each and every one of us. There is no sinner on earth who cannot perform Teshuba, because there is no sinner on earth whose inner spark of Kedusha has been extinguished.

The Talmud in Masechet Aboda Zara tells the astounding story of Elazar Ben Dordaya, who was, literally, addicted to lust. He visited every Zona (woman of ill-repute) in the world, and at one point he traveled a great distance and spent an enormous fortune to visit such a woman. As he was with her, she mentioned to him that he could not repent. Her remark rattled Elazar, and he ran from her house, looked up to the heavens, and repented. As he wept, his soul departed, and a voice burst forth from the heavens announcing that he has earned a share in the world to come.

This story teaches that God will go anywhere – even to a house of ill-repute!! – in order to bring back one of His children who has gone astray. Just as a father will jump into a malodorous trash bin to save his child, similarly, God will go anywhere He is needed to inspire a sinner to repent. Even if everyone else has despaired from a certain sinner, God never despairs. He still sees that spark of Kedusha, and knows that this spark can ignite a raging fire of holiness and spiritual devotion.

Of course, this will only happen if we ourselves recognize this spark. We must trust in our ability to return, and in God’s willingness to accept us. And when we have this trust, Yom Kippur is truly the most joyous, most exciting, and most exhilarating day on the Jewish calendar.

Throwing Away Our Arrogance

Perhaps the most intriguing feature of the Yom Kippur service that was performed in the Bet Ha’mikdash is the “Sa’ir La’azazel,” the goat that was carried out to the desert and cast off a cliff,

symbolic of the banishment of Beneh Yisrael's sins. As the Torah describes in the Book of Vayikra (16), the Kohen Gadol would take two goats and cast lots to determine which would be offered as a sacrifice in the Bet Ha'mikdash, and which would be carried out into the desert.

Many commentators addressed the question of how to explain the meaning of this unusual ritual. Normally, the Torah strictly forbids any sort of sacrificial offerings outside the Bet Ha'mikdash. Animal sacrifices must be offered only in the Bet Ha'mikdash in Jerusalem, and only in the specific format dictated by the Halacha – proper slaughtering, followed by the sprinkling of the blood on the altar and the placement of certain parts of the animal on the altar to be burned. Why suddenly on Yom Kippur does the Torah require this unusual "sacrifice," taking an animal out to the desert and throwing it off a cliff?

One explanation is offered by the Meshech Hochma commentary (by Rav Meir Simcha Ha'kohen of Dvinsk, 1843-1926), in Parashat Ahareh-Mot. He writes that the two goats of the Yom Kippur service atoned for the two categories of sin that people commit: violations between man and G-d ("Ben Adam La'Makom") and sins between man and his fellow ("Ben Adam La'habero"). Specifically, the goat offered as a sacrifice in the Bet Ha'mikdash atoned for sins "Ben Adam La'Makom," whereas the "Sa'ir La'azazel" atoned for interpersonal violations. To explain the association between the "Sa'ir La'azazel" and interpersonal offenses, the Meshech Hochma draws our attention to the Halacha requiring tying a crimson string on the horns of the goat, and that the string should have the weight of two Sela'im. This weight – two Sela'im – is familiar to us from a different context. The Gemara in Masechet Megilla (16b) tells that Yosef's brothers envied him because their father, Yaakov, made for him a special cloak that contained two Sela'im more material than the amount used for their garments. This jealousy precipitated the sale of Yosef, the quintessential sin "Ben Adam La'habero" that is the root of all sins that Jews have committed against one another ever since. The "Sa'ir La'azazel" contained a piece of material weighing two Sela'im because it served to atone for the nation's interpersonal sins, which have their origins in the sale of Yosef, which resulted from the extra two Sela'im of material in Yosef's garment.

On this basis, the Meshech Hochma proceeds to explain the unusual manner of "sacrificing" this goat – by throwing it off a tall cliff. The root cause of all interpersonal offenses is arrogance. We feel entitled to hurt, insult, offend, cheat and disregard our fellow because we feel we are more important than he is. When we feel we are worth more than our fellow Jew, we grant ourselves the right to mistreat him. In order to atone for our interpersonal sins, then, we need to throw our arrogance off a cliff, so-to-speak, to humble ourselves and recognize that our feelings, our sensitivities, our needs and our concerns are no more important than those of our fellow. The "Sa'ir La'azazel" is brought to a tall cliff and then thrown down to symbolize the breaking of our arrogance that must occur as part of our

process of repentance on Yom Kippur. In order for us to earn atonement for the wrongs committed against our fellow Jew, we need to throw away our arrogance, to lower our heads and learn to value the needs and feelings of our fellow Jew as much we value our own needs and feelings.

Yom Kippur and Rehab

The Hida (Rav Haim Yosef David Azulai, 1724-1806), in one of his discourses for Shabbat Shuba, recorded in his work Debarim Ahadim (#20), shows that the Aseret Yemeh Teshuba – the Ten Days of Repentance from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur – correspond to the Ten Commandments. This special period, when G-d's hand is outstretched, lovingly inviting us to return to Him and perform Teshuba, were given to us in the merit of our acceptance of the Ten Commandments, which encapsulate all 613 Misvot.

According to this correspondence, the Hida observes, the final day of the Aseret Yemeh Teshuba – Yom Kippur – corresponds to the final of the Ten Commandments – the prohibition of "Lo Tahmod" ("You shall not covet"). Yom Kippur, the most special day of the year, the day of unparalleled sanctity and closeness to Hashem, is associated specifically with "Lo Tahmod," the prohibition against jealousy and competitiveness.

How do we explain this connection? Why is Yom Kippur linked to "Lo Tahmod," as opposed to any of the other Misvot in the Torah?

To understand this connection, we need to understand the difference between bad habits, and addictions. Bad habits can be broken with relative ease. We all have bad habits, and we all occasionally make wrong decisions, and these can be corrected. It is not always easy, but it is not exceedingly difficult, either. We can introduce changes to our lifestyle, or just live with a greater awareness, in order to break these tendencies. Addictions, however, are so destructive precisely because they are so difficult to break. A conscious decision to change does not suffice to break an addiction. An addict needs rehab in order to break the addiction.

A similar distinction exists in the realm of spiritual ills. All sins are, of course, bad. But some destroy a person's spiritual life altogether, because they consume a person and become like addictions. This is taught to us by the Mishna in Pirkeh Abot (4:21), which warns, "Ha'kin'a Ve'hata'ava Ve'ha'kabod Mosi'in Et Ha'adam Min Ha'olam" – "Jealousy, desire and honor bring a person out of this world." These characteristics are not only wrong, but terribly addictive and destructive. They consume a person like an addiction, leading him to act irrationally to his own detriment in his quest to compete with others, or in his pursuit of pleasure or prestige.

The Hida explains that a preoccupation with materialism is particularly injurious. When a person feels he needs to “keep up,” to buy more and more, he ends up forgetting Hashem. We might consider an analogy to a person trying to listen to two different voices. If one is amplified, he cannot hear the other. Similarly, if a person “amplifies” his pursuit of material delights, then he cannot pay attention to spirituality.

And this, the Hida writes, is the purpose of Yom Kippur. We might say that Yom Kippur serves as our “rehab,” as the time to “detox” our beings from our pursuit of luxury and physical comforts. This occasion is linked to “Lo Tahmod” because it is the time when we reverse this destructive tendency to excessively desire, crave, consume and indulge. We go to the opposite extreme, withdrawing entirely from physical enjoyment, and devoting ourselves exclusively on spirituality. This is our “rehab” session to recalibrate our beings, to restore our balance, to ensure that we moderate our indulgence in physical and material delights so we can devote ourselves to Hashem.

The Yom Kippur Fast – Guidelines For a Woman Who Has Just Given Birth

The Shulhan Aruch (Orah Haim 617:10) rules that a woman who gave birth within three days before Yom Kippur is entirely exempt from the Yom Kippur fast, and is permitted to eat on Yom Kippur as much as she normally does. Since a woman during this period is exceedingly frail, any diminishing of her food intake could be injurious to her health, and so she is allowed to eat as usual.

According to the Shulhan Aruch, this exemption applies only if the woman gave birth within three halachic days before Yom Kippur. This means that if she gave birth at 2pm on Monday, the first day ends several hours later, at sundown, and the third day ends with sundown on Wednesday afternoon. Therefore, if Yom Kippur begins Wednesday night, then according to the Shulhan Aruch, she must observe the fast (and she is allowed to eat only if she feels a special need to do so). Other Poskim, however, disagreed, and maintained that a woman is entirely exempt from the Yom Kippur fast for a full 72 hours after childbirth. And so in the case of a woman who gave birth at 2pm on Monday, the exemption extends until Thursday afternoon. Since the issue at stake is the woman's health, and a potential risk to life, Halacha follows the lenient position, even against the ruling of the Shulhan Aruch, and so the exemption extends for a full 72 hours after childbirth. Nevertheless (as noted by the Sha'ar Ha'siyun), after the third Halachic day the woman should not eat as much as she wants, but should eat only as much as she feels she needs to in order to maintain her health. Although she is, strictly speaking, exempt from fasting, it is proper at this point for her not to eat normally, but only what is necessary.

The 72-hour period begins at the time the baby is delivered – as opposed to the time when active labor began – and it ends after 72 hours, even if this period ends in the middle of Yom Kippur. Thus, in the case described above, where the 72 hours end at 2pm on Thursday, which is Yom Kippur, the woman is required to fast after 2pm, and she may eat only if she feels a special need.

If the 72-hour period ends an hour or so into Yom Kippur, then the woman should be stringent and observe the fast, if she is physically capable of fasting. Since in any event there is only one hour or so when she would be permitted to eat, and she does not need to eat every hour, it is proper in this case for her to observe the fast, and to eat only if she feels it is absolutely necessary. This is the ruling of Hacham Bension Abba Shaul (Israel, 1924-1998), in his Ner Siyon.

Summary: If Yom Kippur falls within 72 hours after a woman delivered a baby, she is entirely absolved from the Yom Kippur fast, and may eat normally. However, after the third Halachic day (defined as the period from sundown till sundown the following day), she should eat only what she feels she needs to, even if she is still within 72 hours of delivery. If the 72-hour period ends during Yom Kippur, she should

fast from that point, and eat only if she feels a particular need. If the 72-hour period ends an hour or so after the onset of Yom Kippur, she should, if possible, observe the entire fast.

Must Pregnant Women Fast on Yom Kippur?

The Shulhan Aruch (Orah Haim 617) rules that generally speaking, pregnant women must fast on Yom Kippur, and under ordinary circumstances, they are not permitted even to drink. It doesn't take much calculation to realize that as pregnancy spans a period of nine months, most people's mothers were pregnant with them during the month of Tishri, on Yom Kippur, and yet they were born healthy even though the mother fasted. Barring exceptional circumstances, pregnant women are generally able to go one day without eating or drinking, and there is thus little room to allow a pregnant woman to eat or drink on Yom Kippur. A pregnant woman may eat or drink only if there is some concern for her wellbeing or that of the fetus, such as if there is bleeding, Heaven forbid, or other complications.

It should be noted that many physicians will warn against fasting to protect themselves from accusations of offering medically unsound advice, and not because there is a genuine risk. Pregnant women must therefore ensure to get a reliable evaluation to determine whether there is a risk involved in fasting on Yom Kippur. It should also be mentioned that it is preferable to stay home and fast than to go to the synagogue and wear oneself down. If a pregnant woman fears she might have to break her fast if she expends the physical energy involved in attending the services in the synagogue, it is far preferable for her to remain at home and pray there in order to be able to complete the fast.

Hacham Bension Abba Shaul (Israel, 1923-1998) rules that when a pregnant woman is required to drink on Yom Kippur, she should place something into the water to make it bitter-tasting, and that way she can drink normally, as much as she feels she needs. If this is not possible, then she must drink in Shiurim (small installments; on another occasion we will explain precisely how this is done).

Hacham Bension further notes that if a woman suffers from iron deficiency, and her hemoglobin count is seven, then she should eat, but in small installments. If her count is six or less, this is considered a dangerous situation and she may therefore eat and drink without restriction. If her count is above seven, and the doctors instruct her to take pills, then she may take the pills on Yom Kippur, though before Yom Kippur she should put the pill in her mouth to ensure it has no flavor.

If a pregnant woman smelled food on Yom Kippur and feels a craving for food, she should be reminded that it is Yom Kippur, and that in reward for abstaining from food she will be blessed with a G-d-fearing child. If this does not eliminate her craving, then she should be given a small taste of the liquid of the food. If this does not help, then she should be fed more of the liquid, and if even this does not help, she should be given small quantities of the food itself. In all circumstances, if her face begins changing

colors, this should be taken as a sign of potential danger and she should be fed without any questions being asked.

A woman in labor on Yom Kippur should eat and drink as much as she needs. A woman is considered to be "in labor" for the purposes of this Halacha once bleeding occurs or she cannot walk on her own.

A woman who gave birth within three days before Yom Kippur does not fast at all. If she says she feels healthy and does not need to eat, she should nevertheless be fed, though in small installments. Some authorities maintain that the three days begin from the time of childbirth, whereas others maintain that they begin from the time the woman goes into labor. As we deal here with a matter involving life and death, we follow the lenient position and count the three days from the time of delivery.

Summary: Under normal circumstances, pregnant women must fast like everyone else on Yom Kippur. A pregnant woman may drink only if a reliable physician determines that she or the fetus would otherwise be at risk. In such a case, she should either put something bitter-tasting in the water, or drink in small installments. A woman in labor, a woman within three days of delivery, and a pregnant woman whose face begins changing colors due to a food craving, should eat and drink on Yom Kippur as much as she needs. In the case of a woman after delivery, if she says she does not need to eat, she should nevertheless be fed, but in small installments. It is preferable for a pregnant woman to remain at home on Yom Kippur if going to the synagogue might cause her to become weak to the point where she will need to break her fast.

Yom Kippur- Halachot of the Final Meal Before Yom Kippur; Using Pills to Alleviate the Effects of Fasting

The Ben Ish Hai (Rav Yosef Haim of Baghdad, 1833-1909), in Parashat Vayeilech, records a custom to dip one's bread in honey or sugar during the "Se'uda Mafseket," the final meal eaten before Yom Kippur. Hacham Ovadia Yosef notes, however, that even those who follow this custom must ensure to have salt on the table, as well, and to dip the bread three times in the salt, as is always done, even if one also dips the bread in honey or sugar.

There is a Torah obligation of "Tosefet Yom Ha'kipurim," or adding a few minutes onto the observance of Yom Kippur. The Torah writes that the Yom Kippur observance begins "Be'tish'a La'hodesh Ba'ereb" – "on the ninth of the month, in the evening" (Vayikra 23:32), indicating that the fast should begin on the ninth of Tishri, the day before Yom Kippur. Therefore, one must begin his observance of Yom Kippur a few minutes before sundown on Ereiv Yom Kippur. This applies not only to fasting, but also to the other prohibitions observed on Yom Kippur – bathing, wearing leather shoes, and so on. Hacham Ovadia Yosef writes that there is no specific period of time that one must add onto Yom Kippur, so one fulfills

this obligation even he begins the observances of Yom Kippur just five minutes or so before sundown.

One who finishes his "Se'uda Mafseket" and then wishes to eat or drink may do so, provided, of course, that the time to begin the fast has not yet arrived. This applies even if he recited Birkat Ha'mazon. So long as the time for the fast has not arrived, one may continue eating and drinking despite the fact that he completed the formal meal.

There are currently on the market a number of pills and suppositories that one can take to help alleviate the discomfort of fasting, such as capsules with timed release that send different kinds of medication throughout the body over the course of the fast. Hacham Ovadia maintains that a healthy person should not take such pills or suppositories, as this would constitute "Nabal Be'rshut Ha'Torah" (violating the spirit of the law, even though it is technically permissible). Once the Torah commanded us to "afflict our souls" on Yom Kippur, it is wholly inappropriate to look for ways to fast without discomfort. Hacham Ovadia does allow taking these medications in cases of a weak or ill person who might otherwise be forced to break his fast on Yom Kippur, or might faint. Barring these exceptional circumstances, however, a person should not make use of these medicines to help alleviate the discomfort of fasting.

Summary: It is customary to dip one's bread in honey or sugar during the final meal before Yom Kippur. One must ensure to begin all the Yom Kippur observances at least several minutes before sundown on Ereb Yom Kippur. It is permissible to eat and drink until that point, even if one completed his meal. One should not take pills or suppositories that alleviate the discomfort of fasting, unless he would otherwise become so faint that he would have to break his fast.

Laws and Customs of Kapparot

It is customary to perform the "Kapparot" ritual on Ereb Yom Kippur – or, if necessary, anytime during the Aseret Yemeh Teshuba – which involves swinging a chicken around one's head while reciting a special text, and then slaughtering the chicken. The Rashba (Rabbi Shelomo Ben Aderet of Barcelona, 1235-1310), in one of his responsa, expressed his stern opposition to this practice, claiming that swinging and slaughtering chickens as a means of atonement constitutes "Darcheh Emori" – following gentile practices. He describes the efforts he made to abolish the custom in his area, and writes that "with the kindness of God" he succeeded in eliminating the custom. The Rashba's position was adopted by Maran, who writes in the Shulhan Aruch that the custom of swinging chickens for atonement should be abolished. This is also the view of the Peri Hadash (Rabbi Hizkiya De Silva, 1659-1698).

However, it has been revealed that the Arizal (Rabbi Yishak Luria of Safed, 1534-1572) indeed followed and strongly encouraged the custom of Kapparot. We, of course, treat all the customs and practices of

the Arizal with the utmost seriousness and respect, as they reflect the customs of the Kabbalistic tradition, which we follow. Therefore, we do not accept Maran's ruling on this issue, and we follow instead the custom of the Arizal to perform Kapparot with a chicken. This practice is also codified by the great Rabbi from Halab (Aleppo), the Eretz Haim Sutton, and by the Ben Ish Hai (Rav Yosef Haim of Baghdad, 1833-1909).

The concept underlying Kapparot is to bring to mind that everything done to the chicken should actually be done to the person. Specifically, the chicken endures all four forms of capital punishment that would be administered by a Bet Din for certain transgressions. Grabbing the chicken by the neck resembles Henek (strangulation); the slaughtering corresponds to Hereg (decapitation); the chicken thrown to the ground after slaughtering, resembling Sekila (stoning); and the chicken then roasted, symbolizes Serefa (burning). One should think in his mind while swinging the chicken that due to his sins he deserves all these forms of punishment, and he should think thoughts of sincere repentance and pray that he should be spared the punishments which he deserves. Specifically a chicken is used for this purpose because a chicken is often referred to with the term "Geber," which is also used in reference to people, and thus a chicken is an appropriate "substitute" for the human being.

Another purpose of Kapparot is to have the opportunity to perform the Misva of Kisui Ha'dam, which most people do not generally have a chance to fulfill. The Torah requires covering the blood of a chicken after it is slaughtered with earth, which is a relatively simple act that fulfills an affirmative Biblical command. Before Yom Kippur, as we seek to accrue as many merits as we can, we perform Kapparot in order to have the opportunity to perform an additional Misva. One should therefore request from the Shohet to be able to cover the blood after the chicken is slaughtered. Before covering the blood, one recites the Beracha "Baruch Ata...Asher Kideshanu Be'misvotav Ve'sivanu Al Kisui Ha'dam Be'afar." If one performs Kapparot with several chickens for himself and his family members, he should have his wife and children cover the blood of their chickens, with the Beracha, so they can be involved in this Misva.

The custom is to take a chicken for every female in the family, and a rooster for every male. If one's wife is pregnant, then he takes for her two female and one male; a female for the wife herself, and both a male and female for the fetus, as its gender is unknown. (This applies even nowadays, when the gender can be determined through ultrasound, since the ultrasounds are not always precise.) One first performs the Kapparot for himself, before performing the ritual for his wife and then children. This is indicated by the verse, "Ve'chiper Ba'ado U'be'ad Beto" ("He shall atone for himself and for his household" – Vayikra 16:6), which suggests that one first brings atonement for himself, and only then for his household. This also follows logically; first one purifies himself, and then, once he has attained a state of purity, he is in a position to bring purification to the members of his family.

Some have the custom of immersing in a Mikveh before performing Kapparot; this is recorded by the Kaf Ha'haim (Rav Yaakob Haim Sofer, Baghdad-Israel, 1870-1939), citing the Mateh Abraham.

The chicken is swung three times around the head, during which one recites a three-phrase declaration – one phrase for each swing: "Zeh Halifati, Zeh Temurati, Zeh Kaparati" ("This is my exchange, this is my substitute, this is my atonement"). When swinging the chicken around someone else's head (such as wife or child), then he says, "Zeh Halifatcha, Zeh Temuratecha, Zeh Kaparatecha" for a male, and for a female he recites, "Zeh Halifatech, Zeh Temuratech, Zeh Kaparatech."

Although the words "Halifa" and "Temura" seem synonymous (as both denote "exchange"), there is a subtle but important difference between them. The term "Halifa" refers to substituting with something superior, whereas "Temura" means the opposite – exchanging something with something else that is inferior. When we begin Kapparot, we are inferior to the chicken, because we have sins on our record, while the chicken obviously has not committed any sins. We therefore begin Kapparot by proclaiming "Zeh Halifati," indicating that we are substituting ourselves with something superior – the chicken. But then, once we've repented, we are superior to the chicken, and we therefore say, "Zeh Temurati" – we are substituted with something inferior.

One must ensure to recite this declaration in the precise sequence of "Halifati," "Temurati," "Kapparati," because the first letters of these words spell "H.T.K.," which is the name of the angel assigned over inscribing people in the book of life (as in the phrase "Hotech Hayim," referring to "cutting out" people for a sentence of good life). Furthermore, "H.T.K." is the divine Name associated with Parnasa (livelihood) that is embedded within the famous verse, "Pote'ah Et Yadecha U'masbia Le'chol Hai Rason" ("You open your hand and willfully satiate all living creatures").

After swinging the chicken, one recites a brief prayer text in which he prays that whereas the chicken is killed, he should be spared for life. It is customary to mention one's name and the name of his mother in this prayer. (We generally use the mother's name when we pray for someone, or for ourselves, because the relationship to one's mother can be definitively verified.) When reciting this text, one should recite "Zeh Ha'tarnegol Yelech Le'mita Ve'ikanes Ani L'hayim Tobim U'le'shalom" ("This chicken shall go to death, and I shall go to good life and peace"). It is important to recite this text, and not the erroneous text of "Zeh Ha'tarnegol Yelech Le'mita Va'ani Ikanes..." This text is incorrect because it sounds as though one prays that both he and the chicken shall be killed, Heaven forbid ("Zeh Ha'tarnegol Yelech Le'mita Va'ani" – "This chicken shall go to death, and I"). One must therefore ensure to recite, "Zeh Ha'tarnegol Yelech Le'mita Ve'ikanes Ani..." This is the ruling of the Kaf Ha'haim.

The Shohet should slaughter the chicken immediately after the individual swings it around his head; the chicken should not be left in a box to be slaughtered later. While slaughtering the chicken, the Shohet should have in mind that he seeks to "sweeten" the five "Geburot" in the "Yesod Ha'malchut." He should also have in mind to repair the human souls that are reincarnated in the chicken, and to repair the soul of the individual for whom he slaughters the chicken.

It is critically important to ensure that the Shohet who slaughters the chicken does so properly, in strict accordance with Halacha. Unfortunately, it sometimes happens that due to the heavy workload, as scores of people bring chickens for Kapparot, the Shohetim are fatigued and thus become lax with regard to the required inspections of their knives and the proper procedure of the slaughtering. Inspecting the knife requires Yir'at Shamayim (fear of God), and also concentration and patience. It could happen that one runs his finger over the blade three times without feeling a nick, but then the fourth time he notices the nick. If a Shohet is tired and overworked, he might not have the concentration or patience required to properly inspect the knife. It is therefore preferable for those who know how to perform Shehita to slaughter the Kapparot themselves, or for one to bring his chicken to a Shohet who is known to be competent and God-fearing. Additionally, it is proper for people to be assigned the job of inspecting the knives during Kapparot, so that the Shohetim, who are busy slaughtering, will not have to bear this responsibility. The Poskim warn that if a chicken is slaughtered improperly, whatever one has gained by performing this ritual is lost by the prohibition of eating non-kosher food. It should also be noted that if it is discovered that one's Kapparot chicken was slaughtered improperly, he has not fulfilled the Misva and must perform Kapparot with another chicken. (If, however, the chicken was found to be a Terefa, he does not need to repeat the Kapparot with a healthy chicken.)

In light of this concern, it is acceptable to perform Kapparot earlier than Ereiv Yom Kippur, in order to alleviate the pressure on the Shohetim. The preferred time for Kapparot is the early morning hours of Ereiv Yom Kippur – based on Kabbalistic tradition – but it may be done earlier if necessary. This would even be preferable if there is concern that the Shohetim will be put under pressure and strain by having to slaughter chickens for many hours from the early morning hours of Ereiv Yom Kippur.

Some have the custom of giving the chicken to a poor person after the Kapparot. The Maharil (Rav Yaakov Ben Moshe Moelin, Germany, 1365-1427) strongly opposed this practice, as it is insulting to the poor to give them chickens upon which one has transferred his sins. Therefore, some have the custom to either leave the chicken with the Shohet, or to eat it oneself and give money to the poor. In any event, the atonement is achieved primarily through the slaughtering, and not by giving the chicken to the poor.

If one cannot use a chicken for Kapparot, this custom can be observed by using money. The money should be given to a poor person as charity. If one performs Kapparot with money, this money cannot be counted toward his Ma'aser Kesafim (tithe of his income). The money serves as his atonement, as a kind of "ransom" for his life, and it must therefore not come from money that he would in any event have to give to charity. (Nor should the cost of slaughtering the chickens be counted towards one's Ma'aser.)

If one uses a chicken, he should state explicitly that he does so "Beli Neder," without accepting this as a lifelong practice, as he cannot know for certain that in subsequent years he will be able to perform Kapparot with a chicken.

Kapparot For a Pregnant Woman

There is a custom known as "Kapparot" which is observed in many communities on Erev Yom Kippur. One takes a chicken and swings it around his head while reciting a text proclaiming that the slaughtering of the chicken should take the place of any punishments he deserves to endure. Men use a rooster for Kapparot, whereas women use a chicken. (Other people prefer using money for Kapparot and then giving it to charity, and this practice is certainly valid.)

The custom of Kapparot requires a pregnant woman to take three chickens – one for herself, and two for the fetus. Since she does not know the infant's gender, she must take a rooster in case it's a boy, and a hen in case it's a girl. If she knows she is carrying twins, then she must take five chickens – one for herself, and two for each fetus. If she knows she is carrying triplets, then she takes seven chickens.

The Halachic authorities debate the question of whether a woman may rely on an ultrasound to determine the baby's gender for the purposes of Kapparot. Rav Yitzhak Yaakov Weiss (1901-1989) wrote in a responsum that he consulted with a leading obstetrician who said that the infant's gender cannot be definitely determined based on an ultrasound, and he thus ruled that such a determination cannot be relied upon with respect to Kapparot. Hacham Ovadia Yosef, however, rules leniently in this regard, and allows a woman to rely on an obstetrician's reading of the ultrasound and take just one rooster or hen on this basis. Hacham Ovadia notes that in any event, taking Kapparot for an unborn child is not required according to the strict Halacha, and thus, for example, if a pregnant woman cannot afford extra chickens for her fetus, she may bring only one hen for herself. Therefore, since to begin with we are not dealing here with a strict Halachic requirement, a woman may certainly rely on the ultrasound and bring only a rooster if the doctors say she is having a boy, and a hen if it is a girl. This ruling appears in Yalkut Yosef – Yamim Nora'im (p. 293, in a footnote).

A woman who is within forty days of conception, and learned she was pregnant through testing, does

not have to bring Kapparot for the fetus. This is ruling of Rav Shemuel Vosner (contemporary), in his work Shebet Ha'levi.

Rav Vosner also mentions that if a pregnant woman brought Kapparot on behalf of the fetus before Yom Kippur, and she gave birth before Yom Kippur, she does not have to bring Kapparot again for the newborn infant. Although some Halachic authorities dispute this ruling, Hacham Ovadia Yosef follows the lenient position.

Summary: A woman who is more than forty days pregnant must bring Kapparot for herself and for the unborn child. If she does not know the child's gender, she must bring both a hen and a rooster for the child, but if she was informed of the gender through an ultrasound, she may rely on this information and bring only a rooster or a hen. If she did Kapparot for the infant and then gave birth before Yom Kippur, she does not have to bring Kapparot again.

Ereb Yom Kippur – Immersing in a Mikveh; Wearing Gold Jewelry; Preparing the Home

It is customary for men to immerse in the Mikveh on Ereb Yom Kippur. This is especially important for the Hazanim who will be leading the prayer services on Yom Kippur, so they can represent the congregation in a state of purity. The work of responsa Min Ha'shamayim (Rabbi Yaakov of Marvege, France, 13th century) mentions that if all Hazanim ensured to immerse in a Mikveh before leading the congregation in Tefila, this would hasten the arrival of Mashiah.

No Beracha is recited over this immersion, as this practice is observed as a custom, and not as a strict Halachic requirement.

If one is unable to immerse in a Mikveh on Ereb Yom Kippur, he can observe this custom by having 9 Kabin – or 12.5 liters – of water poured on him. The Ben Ish Hai (Rav Yosef Haim of Baghdad, 1833-1909) writes that somebody else should pour the water over the person. This quantity of water should be placed into buckets, and just before each bucket is emptied over the person, the next bucket should begin to be poured. The Ben Ish Hai also mentions another option, which is to wash a special Netilat Yadayim forty times with special Kavanot (intentions). Nowadays, when we have showers in the homes, it suffices to stand under the shower until 12.5 liters of waters falls over the body, if one is unable to immerse in a Mikveh.

Strictly speaking, one is not required to remove Hasisot ("obstructions") from his body before this immersion, since, as mentioned, this practice is observed only as a custom, and not as an outright Halachic requirement. This is the ruling of Hacham Ovadia Yosef. Nevertheless, given the importance of entering Yom Kippur in a state of purity, it is proper to remove any rings or other objects from the

body, and to cut one's fingernails, before immersing.

Some have the custom of reciting Vidui (confession) while in the Mikveh. Of course, one must ensure not to utter God's Name in the Mikveh, but it is permissible to make the Vidui declaration without mentioning God's Name while in the Mikveh.

The Kavanot that one should have while immersing in the Mikveh on Ereb Yom Kippur are the same as one should have before immersing on Ereb Rosh Hashanah. Namely, the first immersion serves to bring on general purity, and the second is to correct the negative trait of anger. (The Hebrew word "Ka'as" – "anger" – has the numerical value of 150, and when we add to that sum the word itself, we arrive at 151, which is the numerical value of the word "Mikveh.") The third time one immerses in the water, he should have in mind to "sweeten" the harsh judgments through the attribute of divine kindness, and the fourth immersion should be done for the purpose of removing the weekday "garments" from the soul. Finally, the fifth immersion serves to bring on the special spiritual light of Yom Kippur.

Only married ladies that are pure can dip in mikveh Ereb Kippur. All others like single girls or ladies that are not pure should not dip ereb Kippur. This is from Ner Sion page 118.

It is proper to immerse on Ereb Yom Kippur even if one had immersed on Ereb Rosh Hashanah and had not become Tameh (ritually impure) in the interim.

One should wear fine garments on Yom Kippur. The Gemara (Shabbat 119) infers this requirement from the verse, "Li'kdosh Hashem Mechubad" ("[you should regard] the holy one of God with respect" – Yeshayahu 58:13). "Kedosh Hashem" refers to Yom Kippur, the day that is sacred before God, and we are enjoined to treat it with respect by wearing fine clothing.

The Be'sel Ha'hochma (Rav Betzalel Stern, 1911-1989) ruled that one should not wear on Yom Kippur a white garment with gold embroidery. White symbolizes purity of sin, and gold brings to mind the sin of the golden calf and thus represents sin. It is therefore inappropriate to wear them together. It is permissible to wear gold jewelry – such as rings and watches – on Yom Kippur. However, the Mishna Berura (Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan of Radin, 1839-1933) writes that one should wear on Yom Kippur only jewelry that one normally wears during the week, but not special jewelry that is generally reserved for Shabbat.

Even though no meals are eaten on Yom Kippur, one should place a nice, white tablecloth on his tables in preparation for Yom Kippur in honor of the Yom Tob, just as is normally done for Shabbat. The tablecloths should be left on the tables throughout Yom Kippur. The Ma'amar Mordechai writes that it is

proper to adorn the tables in one's home for Yom Kippur by placing Torah books on them. This is mentioned by the Ben Ish Hai, as well, and Rav Haim Palachi (Turkey, 1788-1869) writes that this is a proper practice to observe.

One should clean the home for Yom Kippur just as one does for Shabbat, because Yom Kippur is called "Shabbat Shabbaton" and should thus be treated with honor just like Shabbat.

Yom Kippur – Candle Lighting

Halacha requires lighting candles each week before the onset of Shabbat, and before the onset of Yom Tob. Before lighting the Shabbat candles one recites the Beracha, "Le'hadlik Ner Shel Shabbat," and before the lighting for Yom Tob one recites, "Le'hadlik Ner Shel Yom Tob." This is codified by the Shulhan Aruch (Orah Haim 263).

In this context, the Shulhan Aruch observes that some people have the custom to also light candles for Yom Kippur, though they do not recite a Beracha on this lighting.

In truth, the issue of candle lighting for Yom Kippur is subject to a debate among the Rishonim. The Rosh (Rabbenu Asher Ben Yehiel, Germany-Spain, 1250-1327) maintained that candles should be lit in the home on Yom Kippur as a safeguard against marital relations, which are forbidden on Yom Kippur. Since marital relations should take place only in the dark, having lights in the home on Yom Kippur helps ensure that husbands and wives will not violate this prohibition. The Mordechi (Rav Mordechai Ben Hillel, 1250-1298), however, maintained that to the contrary, if lights are lit in the home, a husband may look at his wife and desire relations, and so it is preferable not to have lights in the home on Yom Kippur.

In contradistinction to his aforementioned comments, the Shulhan Aruch later, in discussing the laws of Yom Kippur (610), mentions only the view of the Rosh, that candles should be lit for Yom Kippur, adding that according to this view, a Beracha is recited at the time of lighting ("Le'hadlik Ner Shel Yom Ha'kippurim"). It thus appears that he accepted the Rosh's ruling, and maintained that one should light candles for Yom Kippur and should even recite a Beracha over the lighting. The Rama (Rav Moshe Isserles of Cracow, 1525-1572) writes that this was the custom among Ashkenazic communities, and this is also the position taken by many Ashkenazic authorities (Rav Sheneur Zalman of Liadi, Peri Megadim, Mateh Efrayim and Hayeh Adam). Numerous Sephardic authorities accept this view, as well, including the Ben Ish Hai and Kaf Ha'haim.

Others, however, disagree, and maintain that in light of the different views that exist among the Rishonim, we must apply the principle of "Safek Berachot Le'hakel" – we do not recite a Beracha when

there is some uncertainty as to whether it is warranted. Therefore, in their view, a Beracha should not be recited over the Yom Kippur candle lighting. This is the view of Rav Haim Palachi (in Ruah Haim), the Peri Hadash, the Erech Ha'shulhan, and others.

As for the final Halacha, Hacham Ovadia Yosef ruled that in communities with an established custom, we do not apply the principle of "Safek Berachot Le'hakel." Therefore, communities that have a custom to recite a Beracha over the Yom Kippur candle lighting should follow this custom. This is also the ruling of Hacham Bension Abba Shaul (Israel, 1923-1998).

The accepted custom in Halab (Aleppo, Syria) was to either not light candles for Yom Kippur, or to light candles without a Beracha. This is documented in the book Derech Eretz, and in the Kol Yaakov weekday Siddur, too, it says that the custom among the Jews of Halab was not to recite a Beracha over the Yom Kippur candle lighting. The exception to this rule, however, is when Yom Kippur falls on Shabbat, in which case candles must be lit before the onset of Yom Kippur because of Shabbat. The custom in Aleppo was to recite at the time of candle lighting in this case the Beracha, "Le'hadlik Ner Shel Shabbat Ve'Yom Ha'kippurim." Hacham Eliyahu Hamoui ruled that even in this case no Beracha should be recited, but the consensus view is that according to the custom of Halab, a Beracha is recited over the Yom Kippur candle lighting when Yom Kippur falls on Shabbat.

It should be noted that women who attend the synagogue service on the night of Yom Kippur recite the Beracha of "She'he'hiyanu" together with the congregation in the synagogue. If a woman does not attend the service in the synagogue, she must still recite the Beracha, as this Beracha is recited over the occasion of Yom Kippur, not as part of the Kal Nidreh service.

Summary: It is customary in most communities to light candles before the onset of Yom Kippur and to recite a Beracha over the candle lighting, but the custom in Halab (Aleppo) was not to recite a Beracha over this candle lighting, except when Yom Kippur falls on Shabbat.

If One Must Eat on Yom Kippur

If a person needs to eat on Yom Kippur for medical reasons, he should, if possible, limit his food intake to a Ke'zayit of food every nine minutes. This means he should eat a Ke'zayit, then wait nine minutes, and then eat another Ke'zayit. As for drinking, a patient who must drink should drink a "Melo Lugmav" – a cheek-full – every nine minutes. Since every person's "cheek-full" is different, one who knows he will need to drink on Yom Kippur should "measure" this amount before Yom Kippur, by filling his cheek with water and then expelling the water into a measuring cup. One can also suck an ice cube every nine minutes instead of drinking the water.

Of course, this applies only if the person needs just a small amount of food and water to maintain his health. But if there is a real life-threatening condition, then it goes without saying that the individual should eat and drink as much and as often as he needs to avoid a risk to his life.

(Based on Hacham Bension Abba Shaul, in Ner Siyon)

What if a Person Faints on Yom Kippur?

Is fainting on Yom Kippur considered to be the type of illness which would justify breaking the fast? It would seem, that since there are many reasons why a person might faint, and it is not clear that fainting is directly related to fasting, that it would not be permitted to give the person food or drink until the reason for fainting is determined.

However, Hacham Ben Sion rules that since there is a doubt, he should be given food and/or water right away, even before receiving medical attention. Afterward, he shouldn't continue to eat or drink, unless the medical professional determines that he should continue eating or drinking. Also, if the patient himself says that he needs to eat or drink, he may continue to eating or drinking.

Summary: Although though it is not clear whether a person who faints on Yom Kippur needs to eat or drink, he may eat or drink even before receiving medical attention.

How Much should a Sick Person Drink on Yom Kippur?

One who received permission to eat on Yom Kippur, based upon the recommendation of a doctor, should not eat regularly, instead, he should eat b'shiurim. Therefore, this person should eat less than the shiur of kakotevet hagasa (a large date), the amount for which one is culpable on Yom Kippur, in intervals of more than k'dei achilat peras, or approximately every ten minutes.

At times, a doctor may instruct a person to drink on Yom Kippur, to be adequately hydrated. How and how much should this person drink on Yom Kippur? The Talmud (Yoma 73b) teaches that one who drink melo lugmav, i.e., a cheek-full of liquid, is culpable on Yom Kippur. Although this amount is relative to the size of a person, it is assumed to be about one and a half ounces. Therefore, we instruct such a person to sip water, without drinking more than a cheek-full (about an ounce), preferably, in the same time-frame mentioned above. i.e., every ten minutes. This is the view of Rav Ovadia Yosef.

Interestingly the Shulhan Aruch was more lenient. He rules that the shiur of Yom Kippur is the amount of time it takes to drink a re'vi'it of liquid. According to this opinion, one can drink a bit more than an

ounce of water after ten seconds or so. This view should only be relied upon if a doctor insists that the holeh must drink this much liquid.

Finally, if a person receives permission to drink on Yom Kippur, is it preferable to receive liquids intravenously? R. Ovadia Yosef (Yalkut Yosef, Hilchot Yamim Noarim, pg. 371) cites R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach who ruled that we do not recommend receiving liquids intravenously. He expressed concern that people may mistakenly believe that a person should be strict, and not drink on Yom Kippur, which may one day endanger the life of a different sick person.

Summary: One who must drink on Yom Kippur is instructed, to drink, if possible, about an ounce of water every ten minutes. We do not tell the sick to receive liquids intravenously on Yom Kippur.

How Much Should a Sick Person Eat on Yom Kippur?

There are individuals who, due to specific health issues, may need to eat or drink on Yom Kippur. A person who is in an immediate situation of pikuach nefesh must eat or drink as much as he needs. However, often, a person is not currently in a life-threatening condition, i.e., pikuach nefesh, but must eat or drink to avoid reaching a life-threatening situation. In this case, how much may this person eat?

We must first determine the shiur of karet, i.e., the quantity of food which one must eat to become culpable (karet) on Yom Kippur. The Talmud (Yoma 73b) teaches that only one who eats the volumetric equivalent of a large date (kakotevet hagasa) is culpable on Yom Kippur. As it is difficult to determine this measurement, the rabbis say this is approximately 2/3 of an egg (kebeisa). As a kebeisa is approximately 56 grams, the poskim say that a kakotevet hagasa is about 36 grams. Also, this amount must be eaten within a certain amount of time, called k'dei achilat peras, the amount of time it takes to eat half of a loaf of bread, which we assume is about 5-10 minutes. If a person ate a shiur of kakotevet hagasa within that amount of time, he is culpable on Yom Kippur.

It is preferable, when possible, for a person who must eat on Yom Kippur to avoid a hiyuv karet. Therefore, we generally instruct a person to eat about 30 grams, and to wait ten minutes, and then to eat another 30 grams, and then wait, and then eat another thirty grams, etc. This behavior is known as eating b'shiurim.

In this case, should he should say the hamosi blessing before eating. Furthermore, if he eats a kezayit, which is a bit less than 30 grams, then he should say birkat hamazon. What about netilat yadayim? If a person eats only 30 grams, then he washes his hands, i.e., netilat yadayim, without a blessing. If he eats the quantity of two olives, e.g, if he ate another thirty grams ten minutes later, then he should say

the al netilat yadayim blessing. Hacham Ovadia Yosef rules that one who washes netilat yadayim on Yom Kippur may wash up to his wrists, as this washing is not for pleasure (Ietaanug).

Summary: One who receives permission to eat on Yom Kippur should preferably eat b'shiurim, i.e., about 30 grams in ten-minute intervals. If he eats bread, he must say hamosi before eating, and birkat hamazon, if he ate a kezait, afterward. Regarding netilat yadayim, he should only say the al netilat blessing if he plans to eat more than two k'zeitim; in this case, if he eats 30 grams of bread at least twice, he should wash with a blessing.

How is a Brit Milah Performed on Yom Kippur?

When a brit milah (circumcision) is performed on Yom Kippur, there are adjustments made to the ceremony.

First, the mohel performs the mesisa on Yom Kippur. During this part of the ceremony, the mohel draws out blood from the wound itself after the milah. Although technically drawing blood is a biblical prohibition, since mesisa is done for the health of the child, it is done on Shabbat and Yom Kippur. Some mohalim have the custom of putting a bit of wine in their mouth before the mesisa; that should not be done on Yom Kippur.

Second, it is customary to say the borei peri hagefen blessing during the milah, before the naming of the baby. The Shulhan Arukh (Yoreh De'ah 265:4) writes that the blessing over the wine is not said on Yom Kippur. However, the custom of many communities, such as Saloniki, Damascus, Halab, and Egypt, was to make the blessing and give the wine to a minor, who is not obligated to fast, to taste. Some even had the custom to make the beracha and give a drop of the wine to the baby; R. Ovadia Yosef objected to this practice, as the wine should be given to a ben da'at. In practice (see Hazon Ovadia, Yamim Noraim pg. 340), the borei peri hagefen blessing is said, and the wine is given to a minor.

Finally, our custom is to say the blessing on besamim on Yom Kippur. There is an additional advantage, as it helps us fulfill the misvah of reciting me'ah berachot (one hundred blessings) each day. Therefore, it is permissible to say the beracha over a hadas branch on Yom Kippur.

Summary: When a brit milah is performed on Yom Kippur, the mohel does the mesisa but does not put any wine into his mouth. The blessing over the cup of wine is said, but the wine is given to a minor, who is not obligated to fast, to taste. The blessing over the besamim is said on Yom Kippur.

May the Kohanim Wash Their Hands for Birkat Kohanim on Yom Kippur?

Although bathing and washing are forbidden on Yom Kippur, Kohanim may wash their hands in preparation for Birkat Kohanim, as is normally done throughout the year. Since this washing is done for Halachic reasons, and not for comfort or enjoyment, it is permissible, and the Kohanim may wash the entire hand until the wrist, as they normally do. This is the ruling of the majority of the Halachic authorities, including Rav Haim Palachi (Turkey, 1788-1869), in his work *Mo'ed Le'kol Hai* (18:3), and Hacham Bension Abba Shaul (Israel, 1923-1998).

However, Hacham Bension adds that whereas generally Kohanim wash each hand three times in preparation for Birkat Kohanim, on Yom Kippur they should wash each hand only once. Since the additional two washings are not technically required, they should not be done on Yom Kippur.

Some Leviyim have the practice of washing their hands before washing the Kohanim's hands in preparation for Birkat Kohanim. Hacham Bension writes that a Levi who normally follows that practice may wash his hands on Yom Kippur, as well. Quite obviously, a Levi who normally does not make a point of washing his hands before washing the Kohanim's hands should not do so on Yom Kippur.

Summary: Kohanim may wash their hands until the wrist in preparation for Birkat Kohanim on Yom Kippur, but they should wash each hand only once, and not three times. A Levi who normally washes his hands before washing the Kohanim's hands may do so on Yom Kippur, as well.

Yom Kippur – Wearing Gold Jewelry

The Gemara tells that when the Kohen Gadol would enter the Kodesh Ha'kodashim for the special Yom Kippur service, he would wear white garments, rather than his usual gold garments. The reason, the Gemara explains, is "En Kategor Na'asa Sanegor," which literally means, "A prosecutor cannot become an advocate." Gold brings to mind the sin of the golden calf, and is thus a "prosecutor" in the sense that it is a sign of our nation's religious failure. As such, it cannot be worn as the Kohen Gadol serves on Yom Kippur seeking G-d's forgiveness on behalf of the Jewish People.

The question arises as to whether this applies to our clothing on Yom Kippur, as well. It is clear that Halacha requires wearing fine clothing on Yom Kippur. The prophet Yeshayahu instructs, "Ve'li'kdosh Hashem Mechubad" – that we should give honor to "the sacred [day] of G-d." The Midrash explains this Pasuk as a reference to Yom Kippur, such that it requires honoring this day. As we cannot give honor to Yom Kippur with fine food and drink, we instead show honor by wearing fine clothing ("Kabedehu Bi'ksut Nekiya"). Indeed, many people have the custom to wear white garments on Yom Kippur, and Ashkenazim have the practice of wearing a white robe ("Kittel") signifying the fact that we become pure as the angels. But may one also wear gold jewelry – such as a watch, ring, bracelet or

necklace – as part of this requirement to dress nicely on Yom Kippur? Or would this fall under the law of “En Kategor Na’asa Sanigor”?

The Halachic authorities rule that wearing gold on Yom Kippur is forbidden only when it is embroidered on a white garment. As white represents purity, it would be improper to include in such a garment a golden accessory which brings to mind the sin of the golden calf. However, if one wears a gold piece of jewelry, or watch, on its own, then this is permissible.

The Halachic authorities also discuss the question of whether this rule applies also to women. Rabbi Akiva Eger (1761-1837), in his notes to the Shulhan Aruch (610), cites the Tebat Gomeh as asserting that since women did not participate in the sin of the golden calf, women may wear gold jewelry even if it is embroidered on a white garment. There is no concern for “En Kategor Na’asa Sanigor,” as there is no possibility of “prosecution,” since the woman did not worship the golden calf. By the same token, Kohanim and Leviyim would be allowed to wear gold embroidery on Yom Kippur, too, since the entire tribe of Levi did not participate in the worship of the golden calf. In truth, however, the Tebat Gomeh himself dismissed this argument, noting that if a woman wears gold jewelry on Yom Kippur, this could trigger “prosecution” against her husband, who purchased the jewelry. This is also the view of the Mateh Efrayim (Rav Efrayim Zalman Margoliot, 1762-1828). Therefore, women, too, should avoid wearing gold jewelry embroidered on a white garment.

It should be noted, however, that the Mishna Berura (Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan of Radin, 1839-1933) rules (610:6) that one may wear on Yom Kippur only jewelry which he or she normally wears during the week. Jewelry which one wears only for special occasions, such as Shabbat and holidays, should not be worn on Yom Kippur, regardless of what it is made from, as this would be inconsonant with the atmosphere of awe and fear that must prevail on this day. One may only wear jewelry that is normally worn on ordinary weekdays, and if it is not gold embroidered in white, as discussed.

This is the ruling of Hacham Ovadia Yosef, as codified in Yalkut Yosef – Yamim Nora’im (p. 335).

Summary: One may not wear on Yom Kippur jewelry that is generally worn only on special occasions, or golden jewelry that is embroidered on a white garment.

Learning Torah on Yom Kippur Night

Although one should generally refrain from reading Tehillim or other portions of Tanach at nighttime, this is permissible on the night of Yom Kippur, as the night and the day of Yom Kippur have the same status. This is mentioned by the work Hemdat Yamim.

The Hemdat Yamim further notes that there is a custom among especially pious people to remain awake throughout the night of Yom Kippur learning Torah, because one hour of Torah study on the night of Yom Kippur is more valuable than a year's worth of Torah learning. However, one should not adopt this practice if it will hamper his ability to properly pray the next day. It often happens that people follow stringencies which compromise their ability to observe basic Halacha, and this can happen in regard to Yom Kippur, as well. I know people who decided to stay up all night learning on Yom Kippur, and because of this they were falling asleep during the prayer service and could not pray with any sort of concentration or feeling. If one knows that remaining awake throughout the night will hamper his ability to pray the next day, it is much preferable for him to spend some time learning at night and then go to sleep.

The Ben Ish Hai (Rav Yosef Haim of Baghdad, 1833-1909) writes that if one generally keeps a glass of water by his bed at night in case he gets thirsty during the night, he should not do so on Yom Kippur night, as he may mistakenly drink during the night, forgetting it is Yom Kippur.

The Gemara mentions a brief text that one should recite before going to the restroom, asking the angels to wait for him while he goes into the restroom. Throughout the year, this text should not be recited, because unlike in the times of the Gemara, we are not on the level where we can assume that angels are accompanying us, and it would thus appear arrogant to recite this text. On Yom Kippur, however, when we resemble the angels – and thus we recite “Baruch Shem Kebod Malchuto Le’olam Va’ed” aloud, like the angels – we may, indeed, assume that we are accompanied by angels. Therefore, one should recite this declaration quietly before going into the restroom on Yom Kippur. This is the ruling of the Ben Ish Hai in his work Od Yosef Hai (Vayeseh, 4). The text is: “Hitkadebu Mechubadim Kedoshim Mesharteh Elyon Shamruni Shamruni Azruni Azruni Hamtinu Li Ad She’ikanes Ve’eseh Sheken Darkam Shel Beneh Adam.”

Summary: Torah study is especially valuable on Yom Kippur night, and therefore one should spend time learning Torah on this night. It is permissible to read Tehillim and study other parts of Tanach on Yom Kippur. There are those who stay awake the whole night learning, but one should not follow this practice if this will hamper his ability to pray properly the next day. One should recite the “Hitkabedu Mechubadim” text before using the restroom on Yom Kippur, as opposed to the rest of the year, when this text should not be recited.

The Misva to Eat on Erebb Yom Kippur

It is a Misva to involve in eating on Erebb Yom Kippur, and one who eats heartily on Erebb Yom Kippur is considered as having fasted both on Erebb Yom Kippur and on Yom Kippur. The Mishna Berura (Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan of Radin, 1839-1933) and the Kaf Ha’haim (Rav Yaakob Haim Sofer, Baghdad-Israel,

1870-1939), in Siman 604, write that one should take time from his Torah learning in order to eat festively on Ereb Yom Kippur.

This obligation applies equally to men and women.

Strictly speaking, one is not required to eat specifically bread on Ereb Yom Kippur, though it is widely accepted to follow the view of the Arizal (Rav Yishak Luria of Safed, 1534-1572) to eat bread, and to ensure to eat an amount that requires reciting Birkat Ha'mazon on the level of Torah obligation (a Ke'besa).

The Kaf Ha'haim records a custom to recite the Beracha of Ha'mosi over two loaves of bread on Ereb Yom Kippur, as we do on Shabbat.

According to the Kabbalists, one should eat on Ereb Yom Kippur the amount one would normally eat in two days. The Kaf Ha'haim adds that one should ensure to eat at least two meals with bread on Ereb Yom Kippur.

This Misva applies only during the day of Ereb Yom Kippur; there is no Misva to eat on the night of Ereb Yom Kippur.

Some have the custom to recite a "Le'shem Yihud" declaration before each meal on Ereb Yom Kippur.

According to some Halachic authorities, it is also a Misva to drink on Ereb Yom Kippur, as indicated in the Gemara's formulation of this obligation ("Whoever eats and drinks on Ereb Yom Kippur.."). It should be noted that according to this view, one fulfills the Misva only by drinking significant beverages, such as wine, grape juice or beer, but not by drinking water, even flavored water. However, wine should be drunk only in small quantities, and only in the morning, so that one is not inebriated when Yom Kippur begins. This is the ruling of Hacham Bension Abba Shaul (Israel, 1923-1998).

One should eat a respectable, festive meal on Ereb Yom Kippur to celebrate our receiving forgiveness on Yom Kippur. The Ben Ish Hai (Rav Yosef Haim of Baghdad, 1833-1909) wrote that it is proper to eat fish on Ereb Yom Kippur. (This is based upon a famous story told in the Midrash, which is mentioned by the Tur.) He adds that the fish should be eaten specifically in the morning of Ereb Yom Kippur.

Foods that increase the likelihood of nocturnal emissions should not be eaten at all on Ereb Yom Kippur. These include milk, garlic, eggs and sharp-tasting foods. The Mishna Berura notes that it is customary

to allow drinking milk with coffee, as this is usually a small amount that will not have an effect upon a person.

Some authorities forbid taking pills before Yom Kippur to alleviate the discomfort of fasting, such as pills that release caffeine or certain nutrients and thus make fasting easier. These authorities claim that since the Torah requires “Ve’initem,” that we “afflict” ourselves on Yom Kippur, it is forbidden to take pills for the sake of alleviating the discomfort of fasting. Halacha, however, does not follow this view and allows taking these pills before the fast, since the Halachic obligation is to abstain from eating and drinking on Yom Kippur, and not to cause oneself physical discomfort.

Should Children Fast on Yom Kippur?

The Shulhan Aruch (Orah Haim 616:2) rules that children under the age of 9 should not fast at all on Yom Kippur. Below age 9, according to Maran, there is no concept of Hinuch (training in Mitzvos) with regard to fasting on Yom Kippur, and thus these children should be fed on Yom Kippur just as they are on any other day of the year. Once a child reaches age 9, the Shulhan Aruch then writes, he or she should be trained to fast for a brief period of time. For example, if a child normally eats breakfast at 8am, on Yom Kippur he should be fed around an hour later, at 9am, so he begins training to fast on Yom Kippur. If the child is weak and it is important for him or her to eat at the regular time, the Shulhan Aruch adds, then the training should begin a year later, when the child is ready.

The Shulhan Aruch then rules that once a boy or girl reaches the age of 11, he or she is required Mi’de’rabbanan (on the level of Rabbinic enactment) to observe the Yom Kippur fast and fast the entire day. (Ashkenazim follow a more lenient view, and maintain that youngsters should begin observing the full fast later.)

However, Hacham Ovadia Yosef, in his Hazon Ovadia – Laws of Yom Kippur (p .340; listen to audio recording for precise citation), writes that Maran’s ruling does not apply nowadays, because of the weak condition of our generation in relation to past generations. Children today are not as physically capable of fasting as the children in earlier generations, and they therefore should not complete the fast until the age of Bar Mitzva or Bat Mitzva. Hacham Ovadia rules that boys at age 12 and girls at age 11 should fast until midday (as defined by Halacha), or approximately 1pm, but then the parents should force them to eat. Unfortunately, there have been incidents of children who insisted on fasting the entire day, or who told their parents they ate when in reality they did not, and ended up becoming ill, Heaven forbid. Parents should therefore see to it that their children are fed on Yom Kippur, and, as mentioned, even 12-year-old boys and 11-year-old girls should eat at midday. Hacham Ovadia applies to this issue the adage, “Al Tehi Sadik Harbeh” – “Do not be exceedingly pious.” There is no value in endangering children’s health for the sake of training them to fast.

Even once a child reaches the age of Misva obligation (13 years for a boy, 12 for a girl), the parents must ensure that the child is strong enough to observe the fast. Hacham Ovadia writes that if there is even the slightest question concerning a child's ability to fast without endangering his or her health, a physician should be consulted.

Should children be trained not to wear leather shoes on Yom Kippur, or are they allowed to wear leather shoes?

According to the strict Halacha, children are permitted to wear leather shoes on Yom Kippur, however, given the availability of comfortable non-leather shoes nowadays, children should be trained to wear specifically non-leather shoes, already from a young age.

With regard to bathing, Halacha permits washing infants and applying oil to their skin on Yom Kippur, but it is customary to be stringent in this regard. Certainly, if a child is dirty, he may and should be washed, and if an infant has a particular need to be bathed or to have oil applied, this is permissible. Under ordinary circumstances, however, children should not be bathed or have oil applied on Yom Kippur.

Summary: Children below the age of 9 should not fast at all on Yom Kippur. Children from age 9 should be fed an hour or so later than usual in the morning, assuming they are healthy and strong. At the age of 12 for a boy or 11 for a girl, the child should fast until midday and must then be fed. Children should be trained to wear non-leather shoes on Yom Kippur already at a young age, and should also not be bathed, unless this is necessary due to dirt or because of health considerations.

Yom Kippur – May Somebody Receive an Aliya or Serve as Hazzan if He Needs to Eat or Drink

The Shulhan Aruch, in discussing the laws of fast days (Orach Chaim 566), rules that somebody who must eat on a fast day may not receive an Aliya to the Torah. The question arises as to whether this applies also on Yom Kippur, if a patient or elderly person is advised by doctors that he must eat or drink, and, after consulting with his Rabbi, he eats or drinks "Pahot Pahot Mi'ke'shi'ur" – meaning, small amounts at a time, as required by Halacha. Such a person clearly acts in full accordance with the Halacha, as he is allowed (and in fact required) to eat to maintain his health. If, for example, such a person purchased an Aliya in the synagogue, may he be called to the Torah? This question also arises in the case of somebody who requires medication, and takes a sip of water to swallow his pill on Yom Kippur. May he receive an Aliya to the Torah on Yom Kippur?

Rav Haim Palachi (Izmir, Turkey, 1788-1869), in several places in his writings (Leb Haim, vol. 3 Siman 134; Mo'ed Le'chol Hai, Siman Tob, #8), rules that one who eats or drinks on Yom Kippur may not be called for an Aliya, even though he eats or drinks in accordance with the Halacha, just like on other fasts. Rav Haim Palachi notes that the Yom Kippur Torah reading speaks of the requirement of Inui (afflicting oneself), and it is therefore inappropriate for a person who is not observing this command – even if he is legitimately exempt – to receive an Aliya to the Torah.

However, the Hatam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer of Pressburg, 1762-1839), in his responsa (157), as well as Rabbi Akiva Eger (1761-1837), in his Hiddushim (24), rule leniently on this issue. They note a fundamental distinction between the Torah reading on ordinary fast days and the reading on Yom Kippur. On ordinary fast days, the Torah is read solely because of the fast; it is the observance of a fast day that obligates the congregation to read the Torah. Therefore, it stands to reason that a person who, even for legitimate reasons, is not participating in the fast may not participate in the congregational Torah reading by receiving an Aliya to the Torah. On Yom Kippur, however, the Torah reading is required by force of the day's status as a Yom Tob. Just as we read the Torah on Shabbat, Pesah and other Yamim Tobim, we read the Torah on Yom Kippur, as well. On Yom Kippur, then, the Torah reading is not dependent upon the fast specifically; it is required due to the occasion of the Yom Tob. Therefore, on Yom Kippur, somebody who does not fast may nevertheless receive an Aliya to the Torah.

Hacham Ovadia, in Hazon Ovadia (p. 349; listen to audio recording for precise citation), follows this lenient ruling of Rabbi Akiva Eger and the Hatam Sofer, and allows someone who is not fasting on Yom Kippur to receive an Aliya. In addition to the aforementioned line of reasoning, Hacham Ovadia notes that if a person eats small quantities at a time, as is required, then he is still considered observing the requirement of Inui, and thus he may certainly be called to the Torah for an Aliya.

Hacham Ovadia adds that an elderly Hazzan who is frail and must drink small amounts of water on Yom Kippur is allowed to serve as Hazzan, even though he drinks. This would certainly apply to a Hazzan who must swallow a pill and therefore takes a small sip of water. Even though he ingests a small amount of water, he may nevertheless serve as Hazzan on Yom Kippur.

Summary: One who eats or drinks on Yom Kippur on the basis of a doctor's instructions, after consultation with a Rabbi, may nevertheless receive an Aliya to the Torah on Yom Kippur and serve as Hazzan. This applies as well to somebody who must take a pill and therefore sips a small bit of water to swallow his pill.

Halachot and Customs for Mosa'eh Yom Kippur

The Habdala recited upon the conclusion of Yom Kippur consists of three Berachot – “Boreh Peri Ha’gefen” over a cup of wine, “Boreh Me’oreh Ha’esh” over a flame, and the usual Beracha of “Ha’mabdil Ben Kodesh Le’hol...” The flame over which one recites Habdala must have been kindled before Yom Kippur. Everyone who will be reciting Habdala should therefore ensure to light a 25-hour Yahrtzeit candle before Yom Kippur so that they have a flame on which to recite “Boreh Me’oreh Ha’esh” in Habdala after Yom Kippur.

Rav Haim Palachi (Turkey, 1788-1869) writes that one must not rush through the Arvit prayer service on Mosa’eh Yom Kippur. This is the first prayer recited after the Yamim Nora’im (High Holidays), and the quality of this Tefila serves as an indication of the quality of our Yom Kippur observance, the extent to which we have truly grown in our commitment to Hashem. It should therefore be recited slowly and with concentration.

Those who build their own Sukka for Sukkot should preferably begin the building immediately after Yom Kippur, even before they break their fast. Obviously, one does not have to build the entire Sukka before eating; rather, one should make some initial preparations for the building before he sits down to break his fast after Yom Kippur. Rav Haim Palachi suggested an allusion to this Halacha from a pair of verses in the Book of Bereshit (33:16-17): “Esav returned on that day along the way to Seir, while Yaakov journeyed to Sukkot...” People who “return...along the way” after Yom Kippur, immediately resuming their normal physical activities, follow the example of Esav. Those who follow the example of Yaakov, by contrast, “journey to Sukkot” – proceed right away after Yom Kippur to begin preparing the Sukka. A famous verse in Tehillim (84:8) states, “Yelechu Me’hayil El Hayil” (“They shall go from strength to strength”). One should proceed from one great accomplishment immediately to the next, and it is therefore proper after Yom Kippur to make some preparations for the Sukka even before breaking the fast.

During the period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, one should spend time selecting his Arba Minim in preparation for the celebration of Sukkot.

Summary: One must not rush through the recitation of Arvit on Mosa’eh Yom Kippur. During Habdala on Mosa’eh Yom Kippur, one recites the Beracha of “Boreh Me’oreh He’esh” over a flame that had been kindled before Yom Kippur. One must therefore ensure to light a Yahrtzeit candle before Yom Kippur for this purpose. It is proper to make at least some preliminary preparations for the building of the Sukka immediately after Yom Kippur, even before breaking the fast.

Asking One’s Fellow for Forgiveness Before Yom Kippur

The Shulhan Aruch (Orah Haim 606:1) writes that one does not earn atonement on Yom Kippur for offenses committed against other people unless he receives their forgiveness. Therefore, it is imperative for a person to approach those people whom he has wronged during the year to ask them forgiveness before Yom Kippur. This applies to both financial and verbal offenses. In the case of a financial offense, of course, one must also return the funds in question.

The Shulhan Aruch writes that if the victim does not grant forgiveness when the offender first approaches him, the offender should return to him, as many as three times. He then earns atonement even if the victim still refuses to forgive. As the Be'ur Halacha (commentary by Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, 1839-1933) notes, it appears from the Shulhan Aruch's presentation of this Halacha that a person should approach the victim accompanied by three people. Even when he approaches the victim for the first time, according to the Shulhan Aruch, he should bring three people along with him. The Rambam (Rabbi Moshe Maimonides, 1135-1204), however, on the basis of the Talmud Yerushalmi, maintains that when the offender approaches the victim for the first time he does not have to bring three people with him. If the victim refuses to forgive, then he should return as many as three times together with three other people. The Kaf Ha'haim (Rabbi Yaakov Haim Sofer, 1870-1939) writes that the accepted practice follows the Rambam's view, and thus one is not required to bring three people the first time he approaches his fellow to request forgiveness.

The importance of requesting forgiveness from one's fellow before Yom Kippur cannot be overstated. According to some opinions, one cannot even earn atonement for sins committed against God if he does not receive forgiveness from the people whom he had wronged. Furthermore, the Kaf Ha'haim writes that if a person does not seek his friend's forgiveness before Yom Kippur, then the prosecuting angel comes before God and argues against this person. The angel contends that the person is not concerned about his sins, as evidenced by his unwillingness to ask for his fellow's forgiveness, and therefore should not be granted atonement on Yom Kippur. One must therefore make every effort before Yom Kippur to make amends with all those whom he had wronged over the course of the year.

Finally, the Sages also emphasize the importance of granting forgiveness to others. The Rabbis teach that one should not be "cruel" by refusing to grant forgiveness to somebody who offended him. A person who willingly grants forgiveness to others will earn God's forgiveness for whatever sins he may have committed.

Summary: It is imperative to ask forgiveness before Yom Kippur from all those whom one had wronged during the year. If the individual refuses to forgive, then one should return to him with three people, as many as three more times, to request forgiveness. At that point, he need not ask forgiveness any further. It is proper for the victim to grant the offender forgiveness.

Immersing in a Mikveh on Ereb Yom Kippur

The Shulhan Aruch, in his presentation of the laws relevant to Ereb Yom Kippur, writes that it is proper for men to immerse in a Mikveh on this day. This marks the only instance in the entire Shulhan Aruch where we find mention of a Halacha involving men's immersion in a Mikveh.

Different reasons have been offered to explain this custom. Some claim that this immersion serves to purify a man from the impurity caused by "Keri" (semenal emissions), and one should endeavor to begin Yom Kippur in a state of ritual purity. Others explain this immersion as a symbolic expression of our desire and efforts to divest ourselves of our sins. The Torah (Vayikra 16:30) speaks of Yom Kippur as the day on which we are "purified" from our sins. In light of this comparison drawn between atonement and purification, we undergo immersion in a Mikveh as a symbolic expression of our desire to achieve atonement.

The Ben Ish Hai (Rav Yosef Haim of Baghdad, 1833-1909), in Parashat Nisavim, writes that a man should immerse five times in the Mikveh on Ereb Yom Kippur. During the first immersion, he should have in mind that he seeks purification in a general sense. The second immersion serves to correct the particular flaw of anger; thus, as one goes under the water for the second time, he should have in mind that he seeks to repair all the spiritual damage he caused by growing angry. The third immersion serves to "sweeten," or assuage, the harsh judgments that God might issue against us. Through the fourth immersion, we seek to remove the spiritual "garments" of the weekday, thereby preparing our souls for the awesome, holy day of Yom Kippur. Finally, the fifth immersion serves to bring upon us the sacred "garments" of the soul for Yom Kippur.

Although one must endeavor to immerse in a Mikveh on Ereb Yom Kippur, if he cannot make it to the Mikveh he should instead have nine "Kabin," or approximately 12.5 liters (roughly 3.5 gallons), of water poured over him. Thus, one who cannot go to a Mikveh can stand under the shower for the amount of time it takes for this quantity of water to pour on him. (The Ben Ish Hai mentions a third option, namely, washing one's hands forty times in a particular sequence, the details of which lie beyond the scope of our discussion.) In any event, as mentioned, it is proper to make an effort to immerse in a Mikveh.

It is preferable to immerse on Ereb Yom Kippur before reciting the Minha prayer. Some have the custom to go to the Mikveh a second time after completing the Se'uda Mafseket (final meal before the fast), in order to ensure that they are pure at the onset of Yom Kippur.

During the time of the Shulhan Aruch, and until recent times, it was customary for women, and even single girls, to immerse in a Mikveh on Ereb Yom Kippur. Nowadays, however, women do not immerse on Ereb Yom Kippur, and certainly single girls should not immerse, as it is customary for single girls not to go to the Mikveh at all until before their wedding.

Summary: It is proper for single men to immerse five times in a Mikveh on Ereb Yom Kippur, preferably before Minha. Some have the practice to go to the Mikveh again after completing the final meal before the fast.

Halachot of the Final Meal Before Yom Kippur; Using Pills to Alleviate the Effects of Fasting

The Ben Ish Hai (Rav Yosef Haim of Baghdad, 1833-1909), in Parashat Vayelech, records a custom to dip one's bread in honey or sugar during the "Se'uda Mafseket," the final meal eaten before Yom Kippur. Hacham Ovadia Yosef notes, however, that even those who follow this custom must ensure to have salt on the table, as well, and to dip the bread three times in the salt, as is always done, even if one also dips the bread in honey or sugar.

There is a Torah obligation of "Tosefet Yom Ha'kipurim," or adding a few minutes onto the observance of Yom Kippur. The Torah writes that the Yom Kippur observance begins "Be'tish'a La'hodesh Ba'ereb" – "on the ninth of the month, in the evening" (Vayikra 23:32), indicating that the fast should begin on the ninth of Tishri, the day before Yom Kippur. Therefore, one must begin his observance of Yom Kippur a few minutes before sundown on Ereb Yom Kippur. This applies not only to fasting, but also to the other prohibitions observed on Yom Kippur – bathing, wearing leather shoes, and so on. Hacham Ovadia Yosef writes that there is no specific period of time that one must add onto Yom Kippur, so one fulfills this obligation even he begins the observances of Yom Kippur just five minutes or so before sundown.

One who finishes his "Se'uda Mafseket" and then wishes to eat or drink may do so, provided, of course, that the time to begin the fast has not yet arrived. This applies even if he recited Birkat Ha'mazon. So long as the time for the fast has not arrived, one may continue eating and drinking despite the fact that he completed the formal meal.

There are currently on the market a number of pills and suppositories that one can take to help alleviate the discomfort of fasting, such as capsules with timed release that send different kinds of medication throughout the body over the course of the fast. Hacham Ovadia maintains that a healthy person should not take such pills or suppositories, as this would constitute "Nabal Be'rshut Ha'Torah" (violating the spirit of the law, even though it is technically permissible). Once the Torah commanded us to "afflict our souls" on Yom Kippur, it is wholly inappropriate to look for ways to fast without discomfort. Hacham Ovadia does allow taking these medications in cases of a weak or ill person who

might otherwise be forced to break his fast on Yom Kippur, or might faint. Barring these exceptional circumstances, however, a person should not make use of these medicines to help alleviate the discomfort of fasting.

Summary: It is customary to dip one's bread in honey or sugar during the final meal before Yom Kippur. One must ensure to begin all the Yom Kippur observances at least several minutes before sundown on Erev Yom Kippur. It is permissible to eat and drink until that point, even if one completed his meal. One should not take pills or suppositories that alleviate the discomfort of fasting, unless he would otherwise become so faint that he would have to break his fast.