

# chosen words

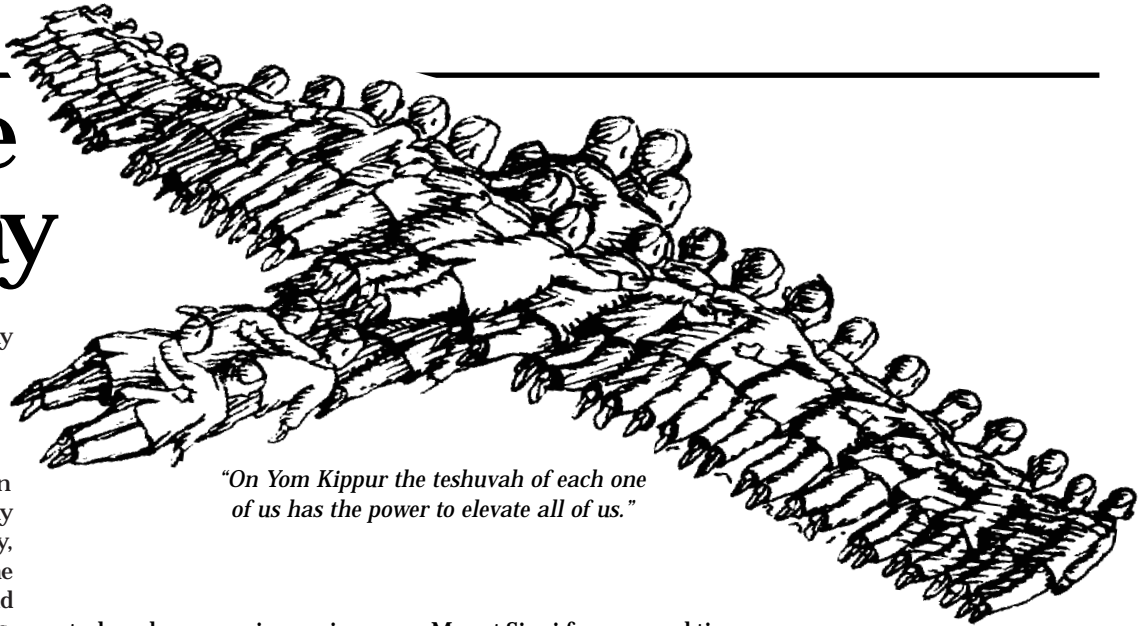
Insights on Yom Kippur

## Like the First Day

The Torah calls the first day of creation “yom echod,” “day one,” rather than the more common designation, “the first day.” The Midrash explains that this phrase can also be translated as “the day of One,” for on that day, Hashem alone existed. By the second day, Hashem had already created the angels, along with the Satan, who was given the power to act as an independent force. But on the first day, it was G-d alone, with no countervailing forces to oppose His unlimited goodness.

The spirit of that first day, when evil was absent, and an overwhelming sense of Hashem’s presence rested upon the world, is recaptured each year on Yom Kippur. By design, the day was created for atonement, for coming close to G-d. With the Satan’s power suspended so that Israel can travel a clear path back to Hashem, we are able to taste the majesty that filled the universe on that very first day.

Because of the preordained nature of the day, it is said that Yom Kippur—the day itself—provides a measure of atonement. It was the day Moshe descended from Mount Sinai with the second tablets, signifying that Hashem had forgiven the Jews for the sin of the Golden Calf. It was the day that the Kohen Gadol would enter the Holy of Holies to bring atonement for the people. Because of the nature of the day, when



*“On Yom Kippur the teshuvah of each one of us has the power to elevate all of us.”*

teshuvah occurs in conjunction with Yom Kippur, its effect is vastly augmented. But even without teshuvah, the day has the power to bring atonement for certain sins.

This seems to run counter to our understanding of sin, teshuvah and forgiveness. Why should someone merit atonement if he hasn’t done his part to bring it? The answer to that question comes from understanding the nature of sin within Hashem’s people. Each of us carries a spark of holiness; each is linked to the other as children of the Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. Each, in his essence, is good. Our blemishes are superficial ones, brought out by the strains of exile. Our essence emerges on Yom Kippur, when every Jew can raise himself to the level of the angels.

Because we are linked, the teshuvah of each of us is linked as well. We are not just individuals standing before Hashem searching our own souls. Because we are parts of one entity, the teshuvah of one of us elevates all of us to a degree. The historic events of Yom Kippur show us the precedent. Moshe returned to

Mount Sinai for a second time as an agent of the people, to beg Hashem’s forgiveness on their behalf. The Kohen Gadol entered the Holy of Holies—the only human being permitted to do so—as an agent of the people to effect atonement for them. And to a degree, through our own teshuvah on Yom Kippur, each of us can accomplish what the Kohen Gadol accomplished.

When one person engages in heartfelt teshuvah, he views all his experiences and interactions as steps that have brought him closer to understanding Hashem’s greatness. He sees the ultimate goodness behind even those events that seemed negative at the time they occurred. His teshuvah therefore becomes a vehicle for the atonement of all those whose lives crossed his and led to his elevation.

The Torah describes Israel as “Yaakov chevel nachalaso,” “Jacob, the portion of his heritage.” But the word “chevel” can also be translated as “rope,” suggesting that every Jew, from the greatest scholar to the simplest person, is attached to each other as if by a single rope. If one pulls the rope at

one end, everything is moved. On Yom Kippur, each of us basks in the special light with which this day has been imbued since Creation. As we delight in Hashem’s nearness and cleanse ourselves of all that separates us from Him, we pull powerfully on that rope, and bring every Jew closer to G-d. Shabbos Table Discussion:

Think of a way in which you have improved your Avodas Hashem during the past year. Can you trace the path of people and/or events that led to this improvement? Did any of these events seem negative at the time it happened?

*Adapted from “Yom Kippur: Overview,” by Rabbi Nosson Scherman with permission from Mesorah Publications*



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# Less is More

Simchah is an essential ingredient of every Yom Tov, but on Succos, it's the defining trait. What matzah is to Pesach, simchah is to Succos. While simchah is a mitzvah for every yom tov, only on Succos are we commanded, "v'simachtem lifnei Hashem," "you should be joyful before Hashem." Only Succos is called "z'man simchaseinu," "the time of our joy."

So how do you get simchah? As on every yom tov, food, wine, guests, and new clothing are basic elements we use to induce this state. But the special simchah of Succos flows from a different source. It doesn't come from what we have; instead, it comes from what we give up. We give up the comforts of our home, and take our meals instead in a

wobbly hut. The usual sources of our pride—a brightly lit dining room, a warm, cozy home—are left behind. And in shedding these amenities of our lives, we pare away the layers that obscure our neshamos; we open ourselves up to receive simchah from its only real Source.

It's hard not to get caught up in the quest for more, bigger and better possessions, in the belief that acquiring them will bring contentment. But Chazal teach that just the opposite is true: "There is no man that leaves this world having fulfilled even half of his desires." When happiness depends on experiencing worldly pleasures, it can't last; desire always returns, leaving the person feeling unfulfilled once more.

"The special simchah of Succos flows from a different source."

The story is told of a king who was very ill. The doctors told him that the only cure was to wear the coat of a man that was completely happy and devoid of worry. The king's servants searched far and wide, and finally found just one man who had absolutely no worries in the world. But the discovery was of no help, because, the man told them, "I don't own a coat. If I had a coat, I would have a worry."

When we leave our homes for the shelter of Hashem's Succah, we free ourselves of the possessions that bind us to the world and its worries.

Coming out of the holiness of Yom Kippur, the shade of the Succah invites us to hold onto the sense of Hashem's closeness. By accepting the invitation, we tap into a source of joy that can uplift us all year long.

*Adapted from Sefer Nesivos Shalom*

## Inner Excellence

# Seven Days of Joy

*What the Calendar Teaches*

If we spent every day immersed in the somber, reverent mood of Rosh Hashanah, or the fasting and penitence of Yom Kippur, would Hashem count us as saints? Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch says that the mood of those holy days is not an ideal for everyday life. This is indicated by the fact that each of those yomim tovim are only one day's duration (Rosh Hashanah is designated as one day in the Torah).

Succos, on the other hand, is seven days long. Seven days represents a complete cycle, an entirety. This, says Rav Hirsch, teaches that the mood of Succos—the mood of simchah—is the ideal to strive for throughout the year. Although we are responsible for taking an account of our actions each day, we are

not meant to be bowed down, broken, immersed in self-analysis all day every day. Hashem designed us to run on the fuel of joy. That is what moves us to wake up each day eager and ready to do our part in this world.

**Shabbos Table Discussion:**

How does simchah motivate people to undertake difficult tasks?

*Adapted from "Growth Through Torah," by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin with permission from the author*

Index Reference 141



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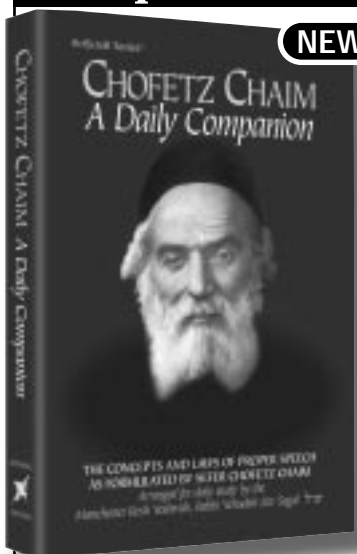
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