



Likkutei Sichos

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Live Atonement

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1.

CONFESSION

Regarding the *Kohen Gadol's* confession upon the *se'ir hamishtaleiach*,¹ the Torah says:² “He shall confess upon it all of the *avonos* of the children of Israel and all of their *pesha'im* among all their *chata'im*.”³ Rabbi Meir infers from this verse⁴ that the order of the confession is “(How does he confess? {He declares:}) *Avisi, pashati, ve'chatasi*.”⁵ The Sages,⁴ however, disagree with Rabbi Meir, since “*avonos* are intentional sins,” “*pesha'im* are spiteful sins,” and “*chata'im* are unwitting sins.” Therefore, “once he confessed the *avonos* and *pesha'im*, does he then confess the *chata'im*?” Instead, the order {according to the Sages} is “*chatasi, ve'avisi, u'pashati*.”

Relating the confession everyone is obligated to say when doing *teshuvah*, *Rambam* rules:⁶

How does one confess? He says: “I implore You, Hashem, *chatasi, avisi, pashati* before You, and I have done such and such. Behold, I regret, and am embarrassed by, my behavior. I promise never to repeat this act again.” These are the essential elements of confession.

Further, however, *Rambam* says (regarding the confession that everyone must say on Yom Kippur):⁷ “The confessional prayer customarily recited by all Israel is: Indeed, we have (all) *chatanu...*”⁸ **This is the main part of the confessional prayer.** Similarly, *Tur*⁹ and *Rema*¹⁰ rule, and the Alter Rebbe phrases it in {his} *Shulchan Aruch* as follows:¹¹ “If... one merely said, ‘*chatasi*,’ he has fulfilled the *mitzvah* of confession.”

¹ {The he-goat that offered atonement by being cast off a cliff on *Yom Kippur*; see *Vayikra* 16:21-22.}

² *Vayikra* 16:21.

³ {*Avonos* (pl. of *avon*), *pesha'im* (pl. of *pesha*), and *chata'im* (pl. of *cheit*) are three categories of sin, which will be explained in more detail in this *sichah*.}

⁴ *Yoma* 36b.

⁵ {I have committed *avonos, pesha'im*, and *chata'im*.}

⁶ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Teshuvah*,” ch. 1, par. 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, ch. 2, par. 8; based on *Yoma* 87b.

⁸ {First person pl. form of *chatasi*.}

⁹ *Tur*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 607.

¹⁰ *Rema* on “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 607, sub-section 3.

¹¹ Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 607, par. 4.

We need to clarify: The abovementioned, unqualified phraseology implies that a confession using the wording “*chatsi*” alone (without “*avisi u’pashati*”) suffices for **all** sins, even for “intentional” and “spiteful” sins. Why should the confessional term, “*chatsi*” (admitting that he has sinned unwittingly) also suffice for spiteful and intentional {sins}?

2.

ESSENCE VS. OPTIMAL

Although “the essence of the confessional prayer” is to say “*chatsi*,” with which a person can fulfill the “*mitzvah* of confession,” ideally, in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* of confession optimally, he should say (as quoted above from *Rambam*) “I implore You, Hashem, *chatsi, avisi, pashati*.... Behold, I regret, and am embarrassed by, my behavior. I promise never to repeat this act again.” Additionally, *Rambam* says in *Sefer HaMitzvos*¹² that the confessional prayer should also contain a request for atonement (“he shall request atonement”).¹³

It emerges that confession has two elements: a) “The main part of the confessional prayer” (or “the *mitzvah* of confession”), for which saying nothing more than “*chatsi*” suffices. b) An **optimal** confession, which contains several additional details (as noted above).

Similarly, we find regarding the general *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*: There is the {basic} **mitzvah** of *teshuvah*, and the **optimal** *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* (as will be elucidated in Section 5).

We can posit that since the need for confession (is not a tangential aspect of *teshuvah*, but rather) is that heartfelt *teshuvah* must be expressed verbally, therefore, confession must also contain these two elements: a) The “**essence** of

¹² Positive *mitzvah* 73.

¹³ As in the Kapach edition of *Sefer HaMitzvos*, although the more common translation is “he shall request forgiveness.”

the confessional prayer,” which expresses the **essence** of *teshuvah* (or, in the Alter Rebbe’s wording is in *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*:¹⁴ “the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*), for which simply saying “*chatsi*” suffices; and b) an **optimal** confession, which expresses **optimal** *teshuvah*, for which all the above details of the confessional prayer are necessary.

3.

THREE OR FOUR?

To clarify, we will preface with an explanation of the dispute among the *Tannaim*¹⁵ regarding “categories of atonement”:¹⁶

Rabbi Matya ben Charash asked Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah in Rome: Have you heard of the four categories of atonement that Rabbi Yishmael expounded? He replied: There are {not four but} three, and *teshuvah* {is necessary} with each one. If one violates a positive *mitzvah* and does *teshuvah*, he is forgiven immediately.... If one violates a prohibition and does *teshuvah*, *teshuvah* suspends {his punishment} and Yom Kippur atones.... If one commits a sin that is punishable by *karres* {excision of the soul} or a sin that is punishable by death by the {earthly} Court and then does *teshuvah*, *teshuvah* and Yom Kippur suspend {his punishment}, and suffering absolves¹⁷.... But one who has desecrated Hashem’s name {*chilul Hashem*}, his *teshuvah* is unable to suspend {punishment}, nor can Yom Kippur atone {for his sin}, and nor can suffering absolve him. Rather, all these suspend {his punishment}, and death absolves....

Commentators question this: Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah also lists **four** categories of atonement, so why does he {correct Rabbi Matya and} say “there are three”?

¹⁴ *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*, ch. 1.

¹⁵ {Sages of the *Mishnah*.}

¹⁶ *Yoma* 86a.

¹⁷ {In the original, ממרקין, lit., “scour.” “Meaning, it completes the atonement. [The verb] *memarkin* denotes the final stage, namely, scouring and rinsing, in order to ‘polish’ the soul. *Kaparah* (“atonement”) is the term for the preceding stage of cleansing, removing the uncleanness of the sin.” (*Iggeres HaTeshuvah*, *ibid*. This is the intended nuance of the word *absolve* when it is used in this translation.)}

There are two explanations:

- a) *Maharsha's*¹⁸ explanation¹⁹ (supported by an explicit passage in the *Jerusalem Talmud*,²⁰ which he cites): Since *teshuvah* is needed “with each one,” it is, therefore, not counted as a **category** of atonement; there are only three “**categories** of atonement: Yom Kippur, suffering, and death.
- b) *Akeida's*²¹ explanation:²² The “categories of atonement” include only sins for which “a person receives atonement during his lifetime” (since “those killed on account of their sins are not included in this count of the categories of atonement, only penitents who remain alive”). Therefore, *chilul Hashem* is not included among the “categories of atonement,” since that is something for which “atonement is not received until death.”²³

One of the difficulties with *Maharsha's* explanation: According to his explanation, it would seem that the **consequence** of Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah's opinion (that “there are three” — and not “**four** categories of atonement”) is *halachically* irrelevant, and introduces nothing novel regarding atonement itself. Because both the questioner — Rabbi Matya ben Charash, and the respondent — Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, share the opinion that “if one violates a positive *mitzvah*” *teshuvah* alone is sufficient. The only difference between them is nothing more than just in the counting — whether or not *teshuvah* is included among the categories of atonement.

We also need to clarify: What is the basis of the dispute between Rabbi Matya ben Charash ({whose opinion is} aligned with what *Tosefta*²⁴ says), who says that “there are **four** categories of atonement” since it includes *teshuvah*, and Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, who says that “there are three”?

¹⁸ {Renowned Talmudic commentator Rabbi Shmuel Eidels, 1555–1631, author of *Chidushei Halachos* and *Chidushei Aggados*.}

¹⁹ *Chidushei Aggados*, ad. loc.

²⁰ *Jerusalem Talmud*, end of tractate *Yoma*.

²¹ {Spanish Torah commentator Rabbi Yitzchak Arma'ah, 1420-1494, author of *Akeidas Yitzchak*.}

²² *Parshas Acharei*, ch. 63, s.v., “*ata sir'eh*.”

²³ {*Yeshaya* 22:14, quoted in *Yoma*, *ibid.*}

²⁴ *Yoma*, ch. 4, par. 9.

That's why *Akeida* says that when Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah says, "There are three," he excludes the penalty for *chilul Hashem* {from the count of the categories of atonement}, thereby contending that atonement is only for the living, but after death "there can be no atonement."²⁵

But this also needs to be clarified: Regarding *chilul Hashem*, the only issue is that it is "**atonement** is not received **until** death." Meaning (even according to Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah), death (at least) *does* provide atonement for the soul. Also, "no charge is made against him ... so he should be punished for his sin, G-d forbid, in the World to Come."²⁶ So at the end of the day, what is the difference (also according to *Akeida*) between the positions of Rabbi Matya ben Charash and Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah?

4.

ATONEMENT AS THE GOAL OF TESHUVAH

The Alter Rebbe says at the beginning of *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*: "It has been taught in a *Beraisa* at the end of Yoma: "There are three categories of atonement, and *teshuvah* accompanies each of them." He then quotes the three clauses: "If one violates a positive *mitzvah*... if one violates a prohibition... if one commits a sin that is punishable by *karres* or a sin that is punishable by death from the {earthly} court...", and he concludes by saying, "**until here is the wording of the *Beraisa*.**" He makes **no** mention whatsoever of {the clause pertaining to} *chilul Hashem* (not even alluding to it by adding an "etc." following the clause of "*karres* or a sin that is punishable by death from the earthly court").

From this we can infer that the Alter Rebbe understands Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah statement that "there are **three**" to mean that he excludes (**not** "if one violates a positive *mitzvah*..." as *Maharsha* maintains, but) {the penalty for} *chilul Hashem* (as *Akeida* proposes).

²⁵ *Akeida*, *ibid*.

²⁶ *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*, ch. 2.

What relevance is there in “*Iggeres HaTeshuvah*” — wherein the Alter Rebbe explains the “*mitzvah of teshuvah*” and the *avodah*²⁷ of *teshuvah* in the revealed and esoteric realms of Torah — to preface with a statement that there are only “three categories of atonement,” emphasizing that {the penalty for} *chilul Hashem* is **not** included?

We can posit that the question answers itself: By citing the “categories of **atonement**” right at the beginning of *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*, the Alter Rebbe highlights that optimal *teshuvah* is accomplished when it brings **atonement**. [This is why he also includes in *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*²⁸ about fasts, etc., which are required to complete the atonement — because this is all included in optimal *teshuvah* and the purpose of *teshuvah*], as will be explained in Section 7.

By emphasizing that there are only “three categories of atonement” and {the atonement for} *chilul Hashem* is **not** one of them, the Alter Rebbe clarifies that the atonement which is part of the (optimal) *mitzvah* of **teshuvah** (and for which reason it needs to be explained in “*Iggeres HaTeshuvah*”) — viz., the atonement that is the ultimate goal of *teshuvah* — only applies to **that** atonement which is attained while a person is alive. Because one of the primary aspects of *teshuvah* is that it can be accomplished specifically while a person is alive, as will be explained below in Section 8. (As such, it does not apply to atonement for *chilul Hashem*, which is achieved after a person’s death).

²⁷ {Divine service.}

²⁸ *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*, ch. 2-3.

5.

THE ESSENCE OF TESHUVAH

The explanation of all this:

Immediately after quoting the *Beraisa* at the end of *Yoma*, the Alter Rebbe says (in *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*): “The *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* as required by the Torah is simply the abandonment of sin... he must resolve in perfect sincerity never again to revert to folly... he will never again violate the King’s command...”

From the nuanced wording “The *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* as required by the Torah is **simply** the abandonment of sin,” we can clearly infer that the Alter Rebbe is thereby negating **all** other elements {of *teshuvah*} (aside for the “abandonment of sin”) — even regret and confession.

*Chovos HaLevavos*²⁹ says that regret and confession, along with the abandonment of the sin (and resolve {not to sin} in the future), are also part of the parameters of *teshuvah*, and as part of the “**conditions** of the parameters of *teshuvah*,” the author lists twenty items. (*Rabbeinu Yonah*³⁰ in *Shaarei Teshuvah*³¹ also lists these three components³² as the “foundations of *teshuvah*,” and twenty “fundamentals of *teshuvah*.”)

Based on what the Alter Rebbe says, however — that the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* is “**simply** the abandonment of sin” — we can infer that his position is this: Although regret and confession are part of the “**parameters** of *teshuvah*” and the “foundations of *teshuvah*,” they are not the essence of *teshuvah*. The essence of *teshuvah* is “**simply** the abandonment of sin.” Therefore, by just abandoning sin, one fulfills the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*.

²⁹ *Shaar HaTeshuvah*, ch. 4. {Authored by the Spanish scholar and philosopher Rabbi Bachya ibn Pakudah, 1050-1120}.

³⁰ {Rabbi Yona Gerondi, d. 1264.}

³¹ *Shaarei Teshuvah*, “Gate 1,” Principle 8 (par. 19).

³² {I.e., regret, confession, and the abandonment of the sin.}

6.

TESHUVAH WITHOUT ATONEMENT

The reason that the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* is primarily (**not** to have regret for the past, etc., but) to have absolute resolve in one's heart to refrain from sinning in the future is because the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* is all about its effect on the person **going forward**: He should cease being a *rasha*³³ and to become a complete *tzaddik*.³⁴ It is **not**, however, about the **past** — to be forgiven and receive atonement for the sins he **previously** committed.

In other words, *teshuvah*, in actuality, (also) leads to atonement for the past, but atonement is not an actual **part** of *teshuvah* itself. Moreover, we can say: It is simply Hashem's will³⁵ that when a **person** does *teshuvah*, Hashem will grant him atonement.

[Therefore, even Rabbeinu Yonah, who says that regret for the past and confession are the “foundations of *teshuvah*” (as discussed in Section 5), does not include {among these foundations} a request for atonement. Requesting atonement is an act of **prayer**. In other words, while doing *teshuvah*, we also ask Hashem to atone our sins. It is, however, **not** within the parameters of *teshuvah*.]

Moreover, atonement is not even a **necessary** result of *teshuvah*, and it certainly is not indispensable to *teshuvah*. This is apparent from there being certain sins — such as “having relations with a forbidden woman and fathering a *mamzer*” — that cannot even be atoned for by Yom Kippur and suffering, etc.³⁶ Nevertheless, as soon as this person does *teshuvah*, he is no longer deemed wicked; his behavior now conforms to “the {normative, and expected} standards of your people.”³⁷

³³ {A wicked person who commits sins.}

³⁴ {A righteous person who does not sin.}

³⁵ {Meaning, the atonement of *teshuvah* is (inherently) not an objective that a person can accomplish. The fact that *teshuvah* does in fact bring atonement is exclusively in the province of Hashem. He desired to give atonement to someone who does *teshuvah*.}

³⁶ *Chagigah* 9a (in the *mishnah*); *Yevamos*, 22b.

³⁷ *Yevamos*, *ibid*.

7.

THE GOAL IS ATONEMENT

The above notwithstanding, the Alter Rebbe still includes a discussion of matters pertaining to atonement in *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*” (as noted above in Section 4). This implies that atonement is also relevant to the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*.

To explain: *Teshuvah* has two aspects: a) *Teshuvah* **itself**, which the **person** has to do, with the focus being on the future, as mentioned above; and b) the **goal** and the desired outcome (and result) of the *teshuvah* — that Hashem should atone for his sins, to the point that he becomes “acceptable before Hashem, as beloved to Him as before the sin.”³⁸ For this to happen (along with a person “abandoning the sin”), the other “parameters of *teshuvah*” are also necessary — remorse, confession, etc.

[However, although **atonement** (for the past) is the **desired outcome** of *teshuvah*, nonetheless, as discussed, even if *teshuvah* does not bring atonement, this does not impede the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*, nor even its primary effect (which concerns {making a firm resolve to alter behavior} from this point on).

8.

ATONEMENT WHILE STILL ALIVE

As known, *mitzvos* are performed only in this world, where souls are enclothed in bodies, and not in *Gan Eden*³⁹ {where souls ascend} after departing from their physical bodies, in accord with the exposition of our Rabbis⁴⁰ of the verse,⁴¹ “The dead are free.” Just like *mitzvos* are **performed** while the soul

³⁸ *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*, ch. 2 .

³⁹ {After a person passes away, his soul ascends to *Gan Eden* where it experiences revelations of Divinity. It remains there until the Resurrection of the Dead, which will take place after the coming of *Moshiach*.}

⁴⁰ *Shabbos* 30a {“When a person dies, he becomes free of Torah and *mitzvos*.”}

⁴¹ *Tehillim* 88:6.

inhabits a person's body, the same applies regarding the primary **achievement** of fulfilling *mitzvos* (not the reward that his soul receives later in **Gan Eden**, but rather) — achieving the purpose for which he was created: “I was created to serve my Master,”⁴² and, “You shall be to Me a kingdom of *kohanim* and a holy nation.”⁴³ Or, in Chassidic parlance: Becoming connected {*tzavsa*} with Hashem, the One who commands {*metzaveh*} the *mitzvos* (since the words *mitzvah* and *tzavsa* are etymologically related⁴⁴), drawing *light*⁴⁵ into the soul as it is enclothed in the body, to the extent that the body itself is purified,⁴⁶ turning it into a receptacle for G-dliness.

This clarifies how the “*mitzvah of teshuvah*” — its goal and purpose being “atonement” — is (primarily) the atonement effected for the soul as it is enclothed in a body, and for the body itself. This is not the case with the atonement effected by death: “**death** absolves” (although also **this** dynamic — atonement being effected by a person's death — is enabled by *teshuvah*).⁴⁷

This is Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah's *chiddush* in saying “there are **three**”: Rabbi Matya ben Charash is talking about methods of atonement, qua **atonement**. Therefore, he counts four categories of atonement, including *chilul Hashem*, since also in this instance, the **soul** attains atonement, at least after it departs the body.

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, on the other hand, is talking about atonement as it relates to the *mitzvah of teshuvah* (or even more, he is talking about how a person is “acquitted”⁴⁸ by doing *teshuvah*— “He acquits those who repent”).⁴⁹ He therefore only counts three categories of atonement — those that offer atonement during a person's **lifetime**, since the (primary) accomplishment of

⁴² *Kiddushin* 82b.

⁴³ *Shemos*, 19:6.

⁴⁴ *Likkutei Torah*, “*Bechukosai*,” p. 45c.

⁴⁵ {“Light,” as used in Kabbalah and Chassidus, is a metaphor for Divine revelation and manifestation. See *Mystical Concepts in Chassidism* (by Rabbi Immanuel Schochet, Kehot, NY) p. 41 ff, for further elucidation.}

⁴⁶ See *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 37.

⁴⁷ {In other words, by doing *teshuvah* while alive, death can effect atonement for the soul with its departure from the body.}

⁴⁸ {*Shemos* 34:7}

⁴⁹ *Yoma*, *ibid*.

(all *mitzvos*, including the *mitzvah* of) *teshuvah*, is to effect the soul as it inhabits the body, as mentioned above.

This is also why in *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*, where the Alter Rebbe discusses atonement as it relates to *teshuvah*, there is only mention of “**three** categories of atonement,” and *chilul Hashem* is **excluded**.

9.

TWO ASPECTS OF CONFESSION

Just as *teshuvah* has two aspects — (a) *teshuvah* **itself**, which primarily concerns the present moment and onward, and (b) optimal *teshuvah*, which corrects and atones for the **past** — there are also two aspects regarding the *mitzvah* of confession (which is the verbalization of heartfelt repentance, as discussed in Section 2),:

(a) The **primary** part (“*mitzvah*”) of confession is to say “*chatsi*,” because this evinces the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* — resolve for the future: Since a person {who confesses} acknowledges that what he did was a **sin**, he consequently resolves to avoid repeating it.

But this confession still does not convey the appropriate **regret** for the past, since by saying “*chatsi*” — which mainly refers to “unwitting” sins — he does not acknowledge that he is in fact guilty of committing sins willingly and knowingly. (All he does acknowledge is that through him — unknowingly — something negative occurred in the world, a contravention of the commandment of the King of the world, and also for this mishap, he manages to come up with various rationalizations.) Consequently, if he considers himself **not** responsible in this matter, the incident does not evoke in him any feelings of regret.

(b) The **optimal** {fulfillment of the} *mitzvah* of confession involves him verbalizing his (complete *teshuvah* —) **regret** for the past, to the extent

(according to some opinions) that he asks Hashem for forgiveness.

On this basis, it is understood how saying “*chatsi*” alone fulfills the obligation of confession even for intentional sins, since it evinces “the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* as required by the Torah (which) is simply the abandonment of sin.”

10.

ATZILUS DOESN'T COUNT

All matters in the revealed dimension of Torah — the body of Torah — are interrelated with the soul of Torah;⁵⁰ moreover, all revealed matters evolve from their counterparts in the esoteric (the soul) dimension of Torah. From this principle, it is understood that the two opinions in the *Braisa* — {whether there are} three or four categories of atonement — exist also in the esoteric dimension of Torah — based on {the explanations of} Kabbalah and Chassidus.

Regarding these two numbers — three and four — the *Tzemach Tzedek* says⁵¹ that in “*keilim*,”⁵² Divine *vessels*, there are three levels; and in “*oros*,” Divine *light*, four. (Three levels of *oros* are en clothed in *keilim*, and the fourth consists of *oros* that are too sublime to be en clothed in *keilim*).

The spiritual worlds, *olamos*,⁵³ are generally divided, therefore, into three levels: *Beriah*, *Yetzirah* and *Asiyah* — since these worlds function as ***keilim***⁵⁴ (while *Atzilus*, which is primarily *oros*, is **not** included in the count).

⁵⁰ See *Zohar*, vol. 3, 152a.

⁵¹ *Or Hatorah, Balak*, p. 979 ff.

⁵² {In Kabbalah, the *sefiros* (divine emanations) consist of divine “lights,” channeled through “vessels” that define and modulate their effect upon creation.}

⁵³ {These are the main stages, and their corresponding realms, in the creative process resulting from the progressive self-screening of the Divine *light* known as *tzimtzum*. In descending order: *Atzilut*, *Beriah*, *Yetzirah* and *Asiyah*, often referred to by their acronym *Abiya*. Additional clarification below.}

⁵⁴ {The function of these worlds is to contain and express G-dly *light* in a manner that relates to the created beings within each respective world. In the world of *Atzilus*, however, G-dly *light* is manifest in an unfiltered form, beyond than the capacity of independent beings to receive.}

On this basis, we can clarify the two opinions of Rabbi Matya ben Charash and Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah:

Kabbalah teaches⁵⁵ that the four categories of atonement correspond to the four worlds of *Abiya*: Positive *mitzvos* — *Asiyah*;⁵⁶ prohibitions — *Yetzirah*;⁵⁷ *karres* and death penalty — *Beriah*;⁵⁸ and *chilul Hashem* — *Atzilus*.⁵⁹

Rabbi Matya ben Charash is talking about *or*,⁶⁰ which has four categories, so he lists **four** categories of atonement; and Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah is talking about *keilim*, so he lists only **three** categories of atonement (and does not include *chilul Hashem*, which corresponds to *Atzilus*).

This correlates with the above explanation in the revealed part of Torah regarding Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah's opinion — it was explained that he doesn't include *chilul Hashem* because its absolution is conferred by **death** — for the soul and body descend from (and are akin to) *oros* and *keilim* (the soul — *oros*, and the body — *keilim*).

The exclusion of *chilul Hashem* because its absolution comes through **death** — the soul's **departure** from the body — correlates with the Kabbalistic explanation that *chilul Hashem* corresponds to *Atzilus*, which is a category of *or* that is too **sublime** to be encloded in *keilim*.

⁵⁵ *Shaar Haqilgulim*, introduction 21.

⁵⁶ {Lit., "action," this refers to the fourth and lowest of the four spiritual worlds, the final level in the creative continuum, which also encompasses the physical universe, where *mitzvos* are performed.}

⁵⁷ {Lit., "formation," the third of the four spiritual worlds, the realm of spiritual existence in which the finite nature of the created beings takes on form and definition.}

⁵⁸ {Lit., "creation," the second of the four spiritual worlds, the realm of spiritual existence which represents the beginnings of a consciousness self.}

⁵⁹ {Lit., "emanation," the first and highest of the four spiritual worlds, the realm of spiritual existence which, although encompassing attributes which have a specific definition, is in a state of infinity and at one with the Infinite Divine Light.}

⁶⁰ {Singular of *oros*.}

11.

ASIYAH DOESN'T COUNT

We mentioned earlier that the *Jerusalem Talmud* says [and according to *Maharsha*, this is also the meaning in the *Babylonian Talmud*] that Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah counts Yom Kippur, suffering, and death {as the three categories of atonement}, but **not** *teshuvah*.

Using the above-mentioned Kabbalistic parlance, he counts *Atzilus*, *Beriah*, and *Yetzirah*, but **not** *Asiyah* (which correspond to positive *mitzvos* [*teshuvah*]).

To explain: (Unlike the explanation in Section 10, above) occasionally, it is also explained that the number **three** alludes to *oros* and the number four alludes to *keilim*:

As known, the ten *sefiros*⁶¹ are divisible into **four** categories: *chochmah*,⁶² *binah*,⁶³ *z"ra*,⁶⁴ and *malchus*.⁶⁵ The first three are “influencers,” while *malchus* is a “recipient” (which is why *keilim* are primarily associated with *malchus*.)

According to this explanation, the first three categories (*chochmah*, *binah*, and *z"ra*) refer to *oros* (the influencers), and the fourth category — the number four (*malchus*) — refers to *keilim* (the recipient). And the same is true for the *olamos* [since these four categories correspond to the four *olamos*⁶⁶]: The number three refers to *Atzilus*, *Beriah*, and *Yetzirah*, and the number four refers to all **four** *olamos*, also including *Asiyah*.

⁶¹ {*Sefiros* are divine emanations. There are ten *sefiros*, which are various phases in the manifestation of Divinity, generally categorized by intellectual and emotional attributes.}

⁶² {Lit., “wisdom,” the first of the ten *sefiros*, the highest of a person’s intellectual faculties.}

⁶³ {Lit., “understanding,” the second of the ten *sefiros*.}

⁶⁴ {An abbreviation of *ze’er anpin*, lit., “the small face,” the configuration of the six *sefiros* from *chessed* to *yesod*, corresponding to a person’s emotional faculties.}

⁶⁵ {Lit., “kingship,” is the lowest of the *sefiros*.}

⁶⁶ *Likkutei Torah*, “*Masei*,” 95a.

It turns out that the **three** categories of atonement enumerated in the *Jerusalem Talmud* (where positive *mitzvos* corresponding to *Asiyah* are not included) also accord with Kabbalah, since (according to this explanation) these three levels refer to *Atzilus*, *Beriah*, and *Yetzirah*, corresponding to *chilul Hashem*; *karres* and the death penalty; and prohibitions.

12.

COMBINING ATZILUS AND ASIYAH

All Torah explanations of a **single** subject are interrelated.⁶⁷ Therefore, despite the two explanations discussed above [whether in saying “there are **three**” Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah negates *chilul Hashem* (*Atzilus*), or positive *mitzvos* (*Asiyah*)] appearing to be contradictory explanations, they are still related:

Commenting on the verse,⁶⁸ “For My glory I created him {alluding to *Beriah*}, I formed him {alluding to *Yetzirah*}, I even made him {alluding to *Asiyah*},” *Likkutei Torah*⁶⁹ explains⁷⁰ that the word “even” (indicating something additional) implies that there is a loftier level than “I created him...” — the level of *Atzilus*. But the word “even” appears specifically in the clause “I made him” because the revelation of *Atzilus* only comes about through the *avodah* in *Asiyah*.⁷¹

This is where the two explanations dovetail — because *Asiyah* is connected to *Atzilus* specifically.

⁶⁷ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 3, p. 782; et al.

⁶⁸ *Yeshayahu* 43:7.

⁶⁹ {A collection of Chassidic discourses on the weekly Torah portion from the Alter Rebbe.}

⁷⁰ Beg. of *parshas Balak*.

⁷¹ {The world of action, i.e. through tangible *avodah*.}

13.

BEYOND ATZILUS TO BENEATH ATZILUS

We can take this even further: The two explanations correspond (not only with respect to the fourth category, which Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah **negates** — either *Atzilus* or *Asiyah* — but) also with respect to the three categories that he **does** count. Meaning, the three levels that allude to *keilim* (according to the *Alter Rebbe's* explanation of the *Babylonian Talmud*) correspond to the three levels that allude to *oros* (as in the *Jerusalem Talmud*).

To explain: Regarding the number thirteen (the {number alluding to Hashem's} attributes of mercy), *Pardes*⁷² offers two explanations: a) The number ten refers to the *sefiros* in *Atzilus*, and the number three refers to the level of *tlas rashei reishin*,⁷³ which is loftier than *Atzilus*. b) Ten refers to the ten *sefiros*, and three refers to three *olamos*: *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*, which are lower than *Atzilus*.

[These two explanations correspond to the two explanations above for three and four: The ten *sefiros* are subdivided into four categories, as mentioned above. So, according to the first explanation, that three refers to the *tlas rashei reishin* which is loftier than *Atzilus*, three would be greater than four. But according to the second explanation, three (the *olamos* of *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*) is lower than four.]

Regarding this, Chassidus says:⁷⁴ “There is no dispute here at all, because the root of the three *olamos* of *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah* is specifically in the *tlas rashei reishin*, which are loftier than *Atzilus*.”

On this basis, it emerges that both explanations of *three* [that *three* refers to *keilim* or that *three* refers to *oros*] are interrelated. In fact, the true depiction of *or*, which is far loftier than *keilim*, is the “*tlas rashei reishin*,” which is **higher**

⁷² {Kabbalistic work authored by Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, 1522-1570.} *Pardes*, “*Shaar Esser Velo Teisha*,” ch. 7.

⁷³ {Lit., “three heads of heads”; cf. *Tikkunei Zohar* 134b.}

⁷⁴ *Maamar* “*Gedolah Milah*,” 5626.

than *Atzilus*, and that *or* is contained specifically by means of the level of *three* that refers to the *keilim*, which are lower than *Atzilus*.

14.

BEYOND ATZILUS TO BENEATH ATZILUS

Just as the three *olamos* of *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah* are related with the *telas rashei reishin* that are higher than *Atzilus*, the same is true regarding the three categories of atonement, which bring atonement to the soul, specifically as it resides **within a body** (which is why Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah does not include *chilul Hashem*, as discussed). The three categories of atonement are also related with a level that is higher than the **four** categories of {the Jewish soul} — *nefesh*,⁷⁵ *ruach*,⁷⁶ *neshamah*,⁷⁷ and *chayah*.⁷⁸ — {The three categories of atonement are connected with the dimension of the soul} that is divested from the body, surrounding the body detachedly:⁷⁹ {the dimension of} *yechidah*.⁸⁰ This connection is so close⁸¹ that it becomes one with {the dimension of} *yachid* — {within which} the spark of created beings is united with the spark of the Creator}, so to speak.⁸²

The *avodah* of a soul takes place in this lower world, in a body, where it fulfills Torah and *mitzvos* specifically in the realm of physicality. As discussed (in Section 8), the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* must also be *fulfilled* (as must all *mitzvos*) specifically by a soul within a body. Because this dynamic, specifically, brings about the soul's elevation to a level that is **loftier** than the plane it was on before its descent {into the body} — higher than the level of “it is pure” (*Atzilus*).⁸³

— Based on talks delivered on Yud Tes Kislev and subsequent *farbrengens*, 5729 (1968)

⁷⁵ {Lit., “life-force,” the lowest level of the soul.}

⁷⁶ {Lit., “spirit.”}

⁷⁷ {Lit., “breathed in.”}

⁷⁸ {Lit., “life.”}

⁷⁹ {In the original Hebrew, “*makif ha'rachok*.”}

⁸⁰ {Lit., “unified,” the highest level of the soul; it is one with Hashem.}

⁸¹ {Meaning that the level of the *neshama* which is en clothed in the body (and does *teshuvah*) is connected with the *yechidah*; and even more,, to the aspect of *yechidah* as it is one with Hashem. For the *yechidah* has two aspects: 1) it is a נרצון נברא, and 2) the יחיד, the נרצון בורא which is מתלבש in the נרצון נברא.}

⁸² See *Eitz Chaim*, “*Shaar Drushei Abiya*,” beg. of ch. 1, quoted and explained in *Maamar* “*VeAta Im Na*,” 5678.

⁸³ See *Likkutei Torah*, “*Re'eh*,” 27a-b; “*Yom Kippur*,” 69a ff. {See beg. of Section 12.}