



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Sicha Summary

Chelek 17 | Acharei | Sichah 1

The Kohen Gadol's personal perfection is expressed through his marital status on Yom Kippur. The conclusion of Yoma. The innate value of the Jew. The power of repentance.

The Verse

Concerning the Yom Kippur *avodah*, the Torah says, “And Aaron shall provide atonement for himself and for his **household**.” (*Vayikra* 16:6)

The Sages

The Talmud (*Yoma* 2a) understands “household” to mean a wife, and concludes that the Kohen Gadol must be married in order to perform the Yom Kippur *avodah*.

Two Formulations

This law can be understood in two ways: 1) The loftiness of the Yom Kippur *avodah* demands that it be performed by a married *Kohen Gadol*. 2) On Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol must be as close as possible to human perfection. Therefore, he must be married.

Rambam (*Laws of Yom Kippur Service*, 1:2) rules that this condition that the Kohen Gadol be married applies to all services performed on this day, even those that are not unique to Yom Kippur, such as the daily *tamid* and incense offerings. This supports the second formulation above. Because the Kohen Gadol must be in a perfect state on Yom Kippur, every service performed that day requires that he be married, even those not unique to Yom Kippur itself.

The Heart of the Household

To understand how Rambam arrived at this understanding, we must first understand why the Torah uses the phrase, “his household” and not, “his wife.” This echoes a statement of Rabbi Yossi, who said, “In my life I have never called my wife “my wife,” but “my household....” (*Shabbos* 118b) Rabbi Yossi’s intention in his nuanced wording was based on his perspective that each relationship and experience should be seen in the context of its ultimate purpose. Rabbi Yossi did not just see his wife as a companion; he saw her as the foundation of his family.

By using the word “household,” the Torah alludes to the depth of spiritual sensitivity the Kohen Gadol must have. He must define everything in his life in terms of its ultimate purpose.

Because the Torah legislates not only the status of the Kohen Gadol’s relationships, but the tone and depth of them as well, it appears that the idea behind this law is the ideal of human perfection, expressed through the Kohen Gadol, and not just the loftiness of the Yom Kippur service.

The Beginning is in the End

This is the connection between the beginning and end of Tractate Yoma. The last Mishnah states: “Rabbi Akiva said: How fortunate are you, Israel: before Whom are you purified, and Who purifies you? It is your Father in Heaven, as it is stated: “And I will sprinkle purifying water upon you, and you shall be purified.” (*Yechezkel* 36:25). And it says: “The hope (*mikvah*) of Israel is God.” (*Yirmiyahu* 17:13). Just as a ritual bath (*mikvah*) purifies the impure, so too, the Holy One, Blessed be He, purifies Israel.”

Several questions:

- 1) What does Rabbi Akiva contribute to this discussion, after Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya commented in the same Mishnah, “From all your sins you shall be cleansed before G-d.”?
- 2) Why does Rabbi Akiva need to cite two verses?
- 3) Why does he not cite a verse from the Chumash as opposed to verses from the Prophets?

The Explanation

Rabbi Akiva teaches that the Jewish people are purified not due to the holiness of the day of Yom Kippur (which Rabbi Eliezer referred to); rather, G-d purifies the Jewish people because of the intrinsic value of the Jews themselves. This is the link to the opening of the Tractate, which highlighted the personal perfection of the Kohen Gadol rather than the holiness of the day.

To make this point, Rabbi Akiva cites the verse, “And I will sprinkle,” which does not refer to Yom Kippur, showing that G-d’s purification of the Jews is not limited to that day. And yet, because this verse refers to the days of Moshiach, obviously a time of unparalleled holiness, he cites the verse, “The hope of Israel is G-d,” which does not speak of Moshiach, so as not to limit this purification to the Messianic era.

He was not satisfied with that second verse alone, however, because “I will sprinkle” is more suited to his point — that G-d’s purification comes from Above, simply because of His relationship to all Jews. This is independent of the Jews’ efforts to “immerse” themselves in the *avodah* of repentance.

On the other hand, the second verse teaches the valuable lesson that the *mikvah* effects purification even if a person still harbors another, more persistent sort of impurity. “The *mikvah* purifies the **impure**,” even in the midst of their impurity. G-d’s love, and His willingness to purify, extends even to someone still embroiled in impurity.

The Lesson

There is never an excuse not to engage in repentance, even if you simultaneously struggle with other negative behaviours and habits.