



# Likkutei Sichos

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## Why Must He Be Married?

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<sup>1</sup> The Rebbe said this *sicha* on 6 Tishrei, the *yahrzeit* of his mother, Rebbetzin Chana Shneerson. On a *yahrzeit*, it is customary for those commemorating the day to make a *siyum*, a celebration of the completion of a tractate of Talmud. The Rebbe recited this *sichah* as a *siyum* of tractate *Yoma*.

## 1.

### THE KOHEN GADOL MUST BE MARRIED ON YOM KIPPUR

Regarding the *avodah*<sup>2</sup> of the *Kohen Gadol*<sup>3</sup> on Yom Kippur, our *parshah* says,<sup>4</sup> “It will atone for him and for his house.” Our Sages<sup>5</sup> explain: “*His house* — this refers to his wife.” From here we learn that the *Kohen Gadol* on Yom Kippur must be married.

This unique *halachic* requirement that the *Kohen Gadol* must be married applies **only** to Yom Kippur, and not to the whole year.

During the rest of the year, the *Kohen Gadol* may join and partake in the *avodah*. In fact, no matter during which *mishmar*<sup>6</sup> he serves, he can, “sacrifice the choice portion.” But to do this, he does not have to be married, as he does on Yom Kippur.

This distinction needs to be clarified and explained: The Yom Kippur *avodah* is the preeminent service. On this day, the highest levels of holiness manifest in space, in time, and in the souls of the Jewish people (as in the well-known phrasing, “*olam, shanah, nefesh*”<sup>7</sup>). The *avodah* was performed in the *Kodesh HaKodashim*,<sup>8</sup> the holiest place in the world, on the “*Yom Hakadosh* {the Holy Day}” (as people commonly refer to this day), i.e., the holiest time of the year; by the *Kohen Gadol*, the greatest of all the *kohanim*, regarding whom

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<sup>2</sup> {The Temple service.}

<sup>3</sup> {High Priest.}

<sup>4</sup> *Vayikra* 16:6.

<sup>5</sup> *Yoma* 2a.

<sup>6</sup> {Lit. guard. *Mishmar* or, pl. *Mishmaros* refer to the groups into which *kohanim* were divided for the purposes of their *avodah*. King David assigned each of the 24 *mishmaros* by lot to a weekly watch.}

<sup>7</sup> {Lit., “world, year, soul.”} According to *Sefer Yetzirah*, these three elements are the foundations of reality the way we know it. (*Or Hatorah Yisro* p. 816 and on.) {*Sefer Yetzirah*, the Book of Formation, is the earliest extant book on *Kabbalah*. The book is traditionally ascribed to our patriarch Avraham, although others attribute its writing to Rabbi Akiva. According to Rabbi Saadia Gaon, the objective of the book's author was to convey in writing how the things of our universe came into existence.}

<sup>8</sup> {“The holy of holies.” The Temple in Jerusalem housed three general locations with differing levels of holiness. The courtyard with the large altar and wash basin etc.; “the holy,” with the *menorah*, incense altar, table for showbread etc.; and the “holy of holies,” with the ark containing the tablets and a Torah, and a statue of angels upon it. Regular *kohanim* could enter “the holy,” if they were performing *avodah* there, but no one could enter the holy of holies except the *Kohen Gadol* on Yom Kippur.}

the verse states<sup>9</sup> “{Aharon} was set apart to sanctify him as holy of holies.” Meaning, Aharon was also the greatest among the *kohanim* in rank of holiness, as the verse says,<sup>10</sup> “the *kohen* who is the **greatest among his brothers... because** I am Hashem Who sanctifies him.”

As such, why must the *Kohen Gadol* be married specifically for (the *avodah* of) Yom Kippur?

Even more perplexing: As part of the preparations for the *avodah* of Yom Kippur (as mentioned in the **very same Mishnah**),<sup>11</sup> “For seven days... would they **remove** the *Kohen Gadol* from his house.” Yet, at the same time, the *Kohen Gadol* having a “house” (a wife) was an essential condition specifically for Yom Kippur!

This then proves that the *Kohen Gadol* being married is a matter of special significance (on Yom Kippur) which **perfects** the qualities of the *Kohen Gadol*. Therefore, his marital status is crucial on Yom Kippur.

## 2.

WHY MUST HE BE MARRIED?

Why the *Kohen Gadol* needed to be married on Yom Kippur can be explained in two ways:

- a) The law governing the **Yom Kippur service** mandates it. Due to the importance and greatness of this *avodah*, it had to be performed by the *Kohen Gadol*, and not by a regular *kohen*. Furthermore, this *avodah* had to be performed specifically by a *Kohen Gadol* who also had a “house — a wife.”

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<sup>9</sup> *Divrei Hayamim* 1 23:13.

<sup>10</sup> *Vayikra* 21:10-15.

<sup>11</sup> *Yoma* *ibid*.

b) The law {governing the characteristics} of the ***Kohen Gadol*** necessitates it. Meaning, the ***Kohen Gadol*** had to attain greater heights and perfection on the day of Yom Kippur. Similarly, there are a number of ranks of *kohanim gedolim* in general (also during the year): One anointed with anointing oil; one initiated into office by his donning of the priestly garments; and the like.<sup>12</sup> In a similar vein, the *Kohen Gadol* on Yom Kippur required the greater standing and perfection afforded by marriage.

The *halachic* distinction between these two explanations:

The Yom Kippur *avodah* also contained some rituals that were not unique to Yom Kippur, but rather were performed every day of the year, for example, offering the *korban tamid*,<sup>13</sup> offering the incense, arranging the flames of the *menorah*, etc. On Yom Kippur, the *Kohen Gadol* also performed these rites. However, the holiness of Yom Kippur also affected the services that were not unique to Yom Kippur, as the *Talmud* says,<sup>14</sup> “it benefits them.”<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, the daily offerings could not compare to the *avodos* performed only on Yom Kippur.

Therefore, if we posit that the law of the Yom Kippur ***avodah*** obligated the *Kohen Gadol* to be married, perhaps for the services unrelated to Yom Kippur, the *Kohen Gadol* had no such obligation.

However, according to the second explanation that the *Kohen Gadol's* spiritual-perfection on Yom Kippur necessitated him to be married, we could posit that even for services unrelated to Yom Kippur, the law requiring him to be married still applied. For this law related not to the services performed, but rather to the *Kohen Gadol*, and he performed all the Yom Kippur services.

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<sup>12</sup> *Rambam, Mishneh Torah, “Hilchos Klei Hamikdash,”* ch. 4, sec. 12.

<sup>13</sup> {The fully burnt lamb sacrifice offered twice daily on the large altar.}

<sup>14</sup> *Zevachim* 91a.

<sup>15</sup> {To borrow the full quote from the *Talmud* *ibid*: “Is that to say that the sanctity of *Yom Kippur* is beneficial regarding the sanctity of the additional offerings but not regarding the daily offerings?”}

On this basis, it emerges that Rambam follows the second line of reasoning, for he writes:<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, all of the other services performed on this day — the offering of the daily incense offering and the kindling of the *menorah's* lamps — were all performed by a married *Kohen Gadol*.

### 3.

#### MY WIFE, MY HOME

We will better understand the above by prefacing with an explanation of the *Mishnah*, “‘And it will atone for him and for his house.’ *His house* — this refers to his wife.” This raises a question: If the word, “his house” (here) means, “his wife,” why does the Torah not state explicitly “(And it will atone for him) and for his wife”?

In most cases, the Oral Law<sup>17</sup> elucidates at length matters written in short in Scripture (“for everything is alluded to in the *Torah*”).<sup>18</sup> However, in our case, the interpretation in the Oral Law of the verse also consists of only one word, “*ishto* {his wife}.” Thus, Scripture itself should have written, “*ishto* {his wife}” instead of, “*beiso* {his house}”?

We must therefore conclude that by using the word “*beiso*,” the Torah aims to teach us something about “*ishto*” that is expressed by using the word “*beiso*.” Meaning, Torah not only teaches the principle that the *Kohen Gadol* must be married; rather, the Torah also teaches that specifically by being married, the *Kohen Gadol* has (the unique advantage of “*ishto*” who is akin to) “*beiso*.”

In order to understand the uniqueness of the virtue of “*His house* — this refers to his wife,” we must preface with a teaching in tractate *Shabbos*:<sup>19</sup> “Rabbi

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<sup>16</sup> *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodas Yom Hakkipurim*,” 1:2.

<sup>17</sup> {Torah consists of two parts: The “*Torah Shebichsav*” (Written Law), which is composed of the twenty-four books of the Tanach, and the “*Torah Sheba'al Peh*” (Oral Law). *Torah Sheba'al Peh* consists of all the Rabbinic exegeses based on Tanach; as well as any decrees that the Rabbis enacted to safeguard Torah.}

<sup>18</sup> Based on *Taanis* 9a.

<sup>19</sup> 118b.

Yossi said: ‘In all my days, I did not call my wife, *my wife*, nor did I call my ox, *my ox*. Rather, I called my wife, *my home*; and my ox, *my field*.’” Rashi explains, “My wife {he called} *my home* because a wife is the essence of the home.” And “My ox {he called} *my field* because an ox is the primary symbol of the field. As the verse states,<sup>20</sup> ‘Many crops come through the power of the ox.’”

At first glance, this is difficult to understand. This statement of Rabbi Yossi is found in the *Talmud* in the context of, and subsequent to, other statements of Rabbi Yossi regarding upright practices, and the meticulous observance of *halachic* stringencies and embellishments. What is noteworthy and meticulous about Rabbi Yossi’s custom of calling, “my wife, *my home*; and my ox, *my field*”?

#### 4.

##### PERCEIVING THE PURPOSE

The explanation:

This practice of Rabbi Yossi demonstrates his approach in serving Hashem, and how he perceived all of existence. When he looked at the world, he saw not only that “this castle has a Master,”<sup>21</sup> and not only that, “Whatever Hashem created in His world, he created only for His glory,”<sup>22</sup> but more than that. When he looked at anything, he noticed not what it was externally; rather, its essence and purpose. This was true to the extent that he had to name objects as they were in **his world**. Therefore, he could not call, “my wife, *my wife*,” for he did not **see**, “my wife”; rather, he saw “my house.” Since marriage (“my wife”) serves as no more than a prelude to the essence and purpose of fulfilling the

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<sup>20</sup> *Mishlei* 14:4.

<sup>21</sup> *Bereishis Rabbah* 39:1. {The *Midrash* details how our forefather Avraham discovered Hashem: Rabbi Yitzchak said: This may be compared to a man who was traveling from place to place when he saw a castle aglow. He said, “Is it possible that this castle lacks a person to look after it?” The owner of the building looked at him and said to him, ‘I am the master of the castle.’” What happened with Avraham our father was similar. He said, “Is it possible that this universe lacks a person to look after it?,” Hashem looked at him and said to him, ‘I am the Master of the Universe.’}

<sup>22</sup> *Pirkei Avos* 6:11.

*mitzvah* of bearing children<sup>23</sup> — building a **house** amongst the Jewish people, which comes as a result of marriage — he saw “my wife,” only as, “my house.”

[In a similar vein, many question why we do not recite a *berachah* when betrothing a wife (“who has sanctified us with his commandments and commanded us to betrothe a woman”) as the Sages established for other *mitzvos*. The *Rishonim*<sup>24</sup> answer that betrothal and marriage serve merely as preparation for the essence and purpose of marriage, which is fulfilled through the *mitzvah* of bearing children.]<sup>25</sup>

This {perception and practice} distinguished Rabbi Yossi’s conduct from that of his colleagues. The other *Tana’im*<sup>26</sup> had periods (days) when they “called, my wife, *my wife*.” That is, they perceived “*ishti*” {being married} **as an end unto itself**, lacking (and preceding) its function of “*beisi*” {bearing children}. **Torah** also validates and gives credence to this approach, as we find in the Torah’s law,<sup>27</sup> “he shall be free for his home” (in order that, “he shall gladden **his wife**,” in the first year) immediately following the marriage, even before bearing children. Similarly (on the festivals) Torah commands, “**he shall gladden his wife**”<sup>28</sup> (to the extent that this obligation frees a husband of other obligations). Additionally,<sup>29</sup> “If a man and woman merit, the Divine Presence rests between them.” And in general, Torah contains many matters regarding married life for a man and a woman unrelated to children.

Rabbi Yossi, however, had a different approach, and conducted himself differently. His entire married life existed only to fulfil the commandment, “be fruitful and multiply,”<sup>30</sup> in order to fulfill the dictum,<sup>31</sup> “He did not create it {the

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<sup>23</sup> {In the original, “*pru urvu*,” lit. “be fruitful and multiply.” A reference to the *mitzvah* of bearing children, based on the verse *Bereishis* 1:28.}

<sup>24</sup> {Talmudic scholars of the 11th through 15th century.} See *Rosh*, “*Kesuvos*,” ch. 1, *siman* 12.

<sup>25</sup> See the opinion of the authority, cited in *Kesuvos* 59b, who maintains: “A wife is *only* for children.” The opinion who dissents appears to disagree just about the use of the word “only” in the dictum.

<sup>26</sup> {Sages of the *Mishnah*.}

<sup>27</sup> *Devorim* 24:5. *Sefer Hamitzvos*, positive commandment 214. {The verse reads as follows: “When a man marries a new wife, he shall not go out to the army, nor shall it obligate him for any matter; he shall be free for his home for one year, and he shall gladden his wife whom he has married.”}

<sup>28</sup> See *Rosh Hashanah* 6b: “As for a woman, her husband must make her joyful on a Festival.”

<sup>29</sup> *Sotah* 17a.

<sup>30</sup> {*Bereishis* 1:28.}

<sup>31</sup> *Yeshayahu* 45:18.

world} to be empty, He fashioned it to be inhabited.” Thus, from the outset, when he perceived this reality (“*ishto*”), he saw only purpose and objective (that would come later) of “*beisi*.”

[An example of this: Our Rabbis say,<sup>32</sup> “Who is a wise man? He who foresees the outcome.” The simple interpretation: A wise man understands and knows the outcome and consequences that will come about from everything. But this teaching is nuanced: The Sages do not say, “he **knows** the outcome” (or, “understands,” or something like that), but rather, “he **sees** the outcome,” which is much more than merely knowing and understanding. The wise man **sees** the future outcome, just like everyone sees whatever is in existence now.

There is a benefit to seeing, as “hearing cannot be compared to seeing.”<sup>33</sup> A person can hear something and be absolutely convinced of its truth, to the extent that he is very affected by it — as we see regarding *Yisro*, “What news did he hear that **he came**?”<sup>34</sup> — Nevertheless, he (*Yisro*) had to come to **see** with his own eyes in order to fully integrate it, because, “hearing cannot compare....”

This is the uniqueness of a **wise man**. His intellect (“hearing”) is so strong that he “**sees** the outcome”; he doesn’t only “know” or “understand” it.]

This also explains why Rabbi Yossi’s statement, “In all my days, I did not call...” follows **immediately** after his statement, “I engaged in relations five times, and I planted five cedars in Israel.”<sup>35</sup> His earlier statement clarifies the intent of his later one. His relations with his wife had no reality other than establishing a *house in Israel* with five *cedar trees*. Therefore, right from the outset (“all my days”), he called his wife by a word indicating her purpose, “*beisi*.”

Furthermore, Rabbi Yossi only **perceived** the purpose not only of human beings, and of Jewish women particularly; he also viewed animals (“my ox”) in

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<sup>32</sup> *Tamid* 32a.

<sup>33</sup> *Mechilta*, “*Yisro*,” ch. 19, par. 9.

<sup>34</sup> *Rashi*, *Shemos* 18:1.

<sup>35</sup> {And who are these cedars? The sons of Rabbi Yossi who were great Sages of Israel: Rabbi Yishmael, Rabbi Elazar, Rabbi Chalafta, Rabbi Avtilas, and Rabbi Menachem.}



terms of their ultimate end. This also included {plant life, such as} grains, etc. He generally saw everything in terms of its “place in the world”: Even when he looked at an ox, he saw only the purpose of its existence, “my field,” i.e., “many crops come through the power of the ox,” brought about by ploughing, sowing, and harvesting the field. Here, too, from the outset, even before the eventual outcome of ploughing and sowing, “in all my days,” he **saw**. Thus, **he could not** call an ox, *an ox*; for in the ox, he already foresaw the field it would plough, and thus called it, “my field.”

## 5.

### SAME THING FOR THE *KOHEN GADOL*

On this basis, we can appreciate the great importance for the *Kohen Gadol* to be married on Yom Kippur and with the idea: “*His house* — this refers to his wife.” That is, as mentioned, he had to have a wife in the literal sense, and perceive his wife, “*ishto*,” only as “*beiso*.” This was also a virtue for the *Kohen Gadol* **himself**,<sup>36</sup> as our Sages say,<sup>37</sup> “anyone without a house is not a man.” Simply put, by having a home {with a family}, a person attains the virtue of “a man.”

Therefore, Torah carefully chooses the terminology “*beiso*,” (and not “*ishto*”) in order to emphasize that the *Kohen Gadol* must stand at a level of righteousness where, “*ishti*” equals, “*beisi*.” As elucidated in the Oral Law, this was the practice of Rabbi Yossi throughout all of his days.

Thus, this rule that a *Kohen Gadol* had to be married on Yom Kippur was not merely a *halachic* obligation; rather, it symbolized the greatness of the *Kohen Gadol*, “*his house* — this refers to his wife,” as explained. Therefore (according to the second viewpoint mentioned in section 2), this was not a

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<sup>36</sup> In addition to (*Yevamos* 63a) “any man who has no wife is not a man,”; or as the *Zohar* (vol. 3 7b, 109b, 296a) writes, “he is half a body.” Furthermore, “He blessed them and called their name **Man**,” only after, “He created them **male and female**” (*Bereishis* 5:2, *Zohar* vol. 1 165a).

<sup>37</sup> See *Yevamos*, *ibid.* “Rabbi Elazar said, ‘Any man who has no property is not a man’”; *Tosfos* s.v. “*she’ein*” comments, “property to build upon and on which to live.”

requirement of Yom Kippur; it was a requirement of the *Kohen Gadol* that enabled him to attain the requisite spiritual level.

## 6.

### QUESTIONING RABBI AKIVA

As known, the beginning and end of every tractate of *Talmud* are connected and correlated. This is the reasoning behind the custom to find a theme common to the beginning and the end of the tractate, when reciting a *hadran*.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, in our case: The first *Mishnah* of tractate *Yoma*, which says, “his house — this refers to his wife,” shares a common theme with (the conclusion of) the final *Mishnah* of the tractate:<sup>39</sup>

Rabbi Akiva<sup>40</sup> said: How fortunate are you, Israel! Before Whom are you purified, and Who purifies you? — Your Father in Heaven, as it says, “I will sprinkle purifying water upon you, and you shall be purified.”<sup>41</sup> And it says: “The *mikvah*<sup>42</sup> of Israel is Hashem”;<sup>43</sup> just as a *mikvah* purifies the impure, so too, the Holy One, blessed is He, purifies Israel.

In order to understand the connection between these two *Mishnayos*, a few questions and nuances in Rabbi Akiva’s words need to be addressed:

- a) What novel concept is Rabbi Akiva teaching here? Obviously, **Hashem** is the One who purifies the Jewish people(’s sins), as written explicitly in many verses of *Chumash* and *Tanach*.

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<sup>38</sup> {A public lecture given at a *siyum*, upon concluding studying a tractate of the *Talmud*.}

<sup>39</sup> *Yoma* 85b.

<sup>40</sup> Interesting connection between Rabbi Akiva and “His house — this refers to his wife.” Our Sages teach (*Kesuvos* 63a) that Rabbi Akiva attributed all of his Torah learning to his wife, as he declared to his students, “Mine and yours is all hers.” [And Rabbi Akiva’s Torah study was on the loftiest of levels. See *Menachos* (29b) “Moshe did not know...”] Furthermore, “everything follows Rabbi Akiva’s opinion” (*Sanhedrin* 86a)]

<sup>41</sup> *Yechezkel* 36:25.

<sup>42</sup> {Ritual bath.}

<sup>43</sup> *Yirmiyahu* 17:13.

Moreover, immediately prior to Rabbi Akiva's statement, the *Mishnah* says:

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria taught: "From all your sins before Hashem shall you be purified."<sup>44</sup> Yom Kippur atones for transgressions between a person and Hashem; however, Yom Kippur does not atone for sins between a person and his fellow, until the person appeases his fellow.

The fact that the atonement of Yom Kippur comes from "**before Hashem**," shows that the atonement comes from Hashem. Accordingly, what insight does Rabbi Akiva's statement contribute after we have learned Rabbi Elazar's words?

- b) Even more baffling: Why does Rabbi Akiva need to quote supporting evidence from the prophets that Hashem purifies the Jewish people? He quotes a verse from *Yechezkel* and (he is not content with that, but cites an **additional** verse from) *Yirmiyahu*. However, there is an explicit verse in *Chumash* (that Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria quotes, as mentioned) {offering similar proof}: "(For on this day) He shall provide **atonement** for you to purify you; from all your sins before Hashem shall you be purified."<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, this latter verse explicitly states both of the details mentioned by Rabbi Akiva: (a) "Before Whom are you purified?" "**before Hashem shall you be purified**," and; (b) "Who purifies you?" "He shall provide atonement... **to purify you**."

We cannot posit that Rabbi Akiva disputes Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria's position, maintaining that Hashem (also) cleanses and atones for sins between a person and **his fellow**, even if the offender did **not** appease his fellow. [Consequently, he cannot bring proof from the verse (as Rabbi Elazar does), "**Before Hashem** you shall be purified."] For the *Mishnah* uses the wording, "*Amar Rabbi Akiva* {Rabbi Akiva said}," and not,

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<sup>44</sup> *Vayikra* 16:30.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*.

“*v’Rabbi Akiva omer {and Rabbi Akiva says}.*”<sup>46</sup> This indicates that Rabbi Akiva does not disagree with Rabbi Elazar, but rather, Rabbi Akiva adds to Rabbi Elazar’s words.<sup>47</sup>

We also cannot say that Rabbi Akiva comes to add and emphasize that even **after** a person has attained forgiveness from his fellow, he still needs Hashem to purify him (even for sins between a person and his fellow). For as explained in many places, even *mitzvos* between a person and his fellow are primarily *mitzvos* between a person and Hashem, for a person must also fulfill them because **Hashem** instructed him to do so. Thus, it is **patently** clear that even when a person has attained forgiveness from his fellow, he has only dealt with the part of the *mitzvah* between a person and his fellow. However, in order to reach **complete** purification (also from the perspective of *mitzvos* being Hashem’s commandments), he must (even according to Rabbi Elazar) be purified by **Hashem**, just as is the case regarding *mitzvos* between a person **and Hashem**.

Rabbi Elazar’s words already emphasize this point, as he writes, “**Yom Kippur** does not atone for sins between a person and his fellow, until he appeases....” Meaning, even after a person attains forgiveness {from his fellow}, he must still attain the atonement of Yom Kippur, i.e., from Hashem.

- c) Why must Rabbi Akiva bring a second proof-text, as he underscores, “And it {also} says”? This wording indicates that Rabbi Akiva acknowledges that his first proof-text is insufficient. As the *Talmud* writes,<sup>48</sup> “*Mai ve’omer*”? {Why was it necessary to cite an additional source?}

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<sup>46</sup> {The nuance is in the order of the words, in one instance the author’s name is placed after the word, “says,” and the other, it is the reverse.}

<sup>47</sup> On this basis we can question the words of the Rif there. Rif writes that Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Akiva disagree regarding someone who sinned against man and Hashem and did not appease the person whom he sinned against. Will this prevent the sins done to Hashem from gaining atonement? Rabbi Elazar maintains that, for this person, Yom Kippur brings no atonement at all. Rabbi Akiva maintains that, nonetheless, Yom Kippur brings atonement for the sins between man and Hashem. {But, as proven above, the terminology indicates that they do not disagree.} [Additionally, Rif’s opinion seems difficult as Rabbi Elazar’s words imply that the atonement for sins between man and man and the atonement for sins between man and Hashem are independent.]

<sup>48</sup> *Brachos* 63a.

## THE PERSON OVER THE OCCASION OR PLACE

The explanation is:

We mentioned earlier, in the interpretation of the opening *Mishnah* of the tractate, that the virtue of “*his house* — this refers to his wife” is not a condition necessary for **the Yom Kippur avodah**. Rather, it is a virtue and a quality critical to the perfected stature of the **Kohen Gadol** himself. Therefore, his being married does not only pertain to the **unique avodos** of Yom Kippur, but it pertains to all of the *avodos* performed on that day, as the Rambam rules.

We can apply a similar concept to the discussion at the end of the tractate regarding the atonement and cleansing attained on Yom Kippur. Rabbi Elazar’s words only teach that Yom Kippur brings atonement. Theoretically, the **day** of Yom Kippur itself could bring about this atonement (due to the holiness of the day). Rabbi Akiva then adds that **the day** of Yom Kippur (alone) is not (solely) responsible for bringing atonement. Rather, Yom Kippur brings about (the revelation of) the **Jewish nation’s** virtue, “**How fortunate are you, Israel**”: It is the bond between the Jewish nation and “their **Father** in Heaven” that brings about the atonement of Yom Kippur.

To substantiate this novel teaching, Rabbi Akiva quotes the verse, “I will sprinkle purifying water upon you.” This verse proves that Hashem purifies the Jewish people **not** only on Yom Kippur (for the verse is speaking about {Hashem purifying the Jewish people in} the era of the future redemption).

Furthermore, this verse, “I will sprinkle...,” implies that the true purity {even in the era} of the future redemption comes about {not as a result of Hashem’s intervention, but} as a result of the Jew’s inherent value (i.e., “even when they have sinned, they are **my children**”).<sup>49</sup> Meaning, a Jew’s merits obtained by dint of his *avodah* and repentance do not bring about the

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<sup>49</sup> *Kiddushin* 36a. *Sifri Ha’azinu* 32:5. *Bamidbar Rabbah* 2:15.

purification, as the verse states earlier in that source,<sup>50</sup> “Not for your sake do I act, house of Israel... I will sprinkle...” That is, neither the holiness of the day (of Yom Kippur), nor the holiness of the place (the *avodah* in the *Kodesh HaKodashim*), nor even the fact that the Jewish people at that time found themselves in a sublimely spiritual state, brought about the cleansing. Rather, it was brought about as a result of a Jew’s inherent essential value, which exists in all places and at all times.

Therefore, we must conclude that even on Yom Kippur, the Jewish people are purified not only due to the virtues of the **day** of Yom Kippur, but (primarily) due to their uniqueness as **Jews**.

However, this verse does not conclusively prove that the purification comes about as a result of the inherent, essential value of a Jew. For the verse speaks of the era of the future redemption, a time when Heavenly mercy predominates. (Thus, one could suggest that this auspicious time will play the primary role, similar to the dynamic on Yom Kippur). Therefore, Rabbi Akiva quotes a second proof-text, “The *mikvah* of Israel is Hashem.” This verse refers to: (a) an *inauspicious* time period; and, (b) a situation in which the Jews are found in an undesirable state. Nonetheless, the verse states, “The *mikvah* of Israel is Hashem; just as a *mikvah* purifies the impure, so too, the Holy One, blessed is He, purifies Israel.”

## 8.

### IMMERSION VS. SPRINKLING

We must still clarify: Based on the above, Rabbi Akiva could have cited **only** the second verse, “The *mikvah* of Israel is Hashem,” and not the first one.

The explanation:

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<sup>50</sup> *Yechezkel* 36:22.

The difference between the two verses: “I will sprinkle,” represents purity similar to that achieved by sprinkling<sup>51</sup> {of *mei chatas*};<sup>52</sup> and, “the *mikvah* of Israel,” represents purity similar to that achieved by immersion in a *mikvah*. Of the differences between sprinkling and immersion: (a) A pure person sprinkles the ash mixture upon an impure person. In other words, it is done by **another** person, whereas immersion in a *mikvah* is done **independently**. (b) Only sprinkling can purify a person from the impurity imparted by a corpse.

Similarly, in a spiritual sense, purity gained by immersion in a *mikvah* represents what a Jew can accomplish on his own, i.e., through his personal *avodah*. A person, however, may sink to a spiritual equivalent of corpse impurity, Heaven forbid. That is, he (manifestly) lacks the “life” that comes as a result of cleaving to Hashem, as it says,<sup>53</sup> “You who are attached to Hashem your G-d are **alive** today.” This person requires purification **from Above**, as expressed in the verse, “I {Hashem} will sprinkle.” Meaning, this cleansing is not a function of the person’s own *avodah*, but rather, comes about because of his **essential** bond with Hashem, which **always** remains intact.

Rabbi Akiva wanted to prove that the Jewish people attain purity as a result of their essential value. This essential value is unaffected by the boundaries of time and is unconstrained by the status of an individual's divine service. Therefore, Rabbi Akiva first cites the verse, “I will sprinkle,” since this verse clearly hints at the purity brought about by the essential bond between the Jewish nation and Hashem.

However, this verse speaks about an era when Heavenly mercy prevails, as explained. Consequently, Rabbi Akiva had to cite a second verse, “The *mikvah* of Israel is Hashem,” which applies to no specific period. This, then, proves that the first verse, “I will sprinkle” also applies at **all** times.

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<sup>51</sup> Interesting to note (*Yoma* 8a) that the *Kohen Gadol* was also sprinkled with the *mei chatas* during the seven days of confinement before Yom Kippur (or according to one opinion, everyday).

<sup>52</sup> {The ashes of the burnt red heifer mixed with water were sprinkled upon one who had been contaminated through having come into contact with a corpse. A person would sprinkle the mixture upon the contaminated person and he would become pure. Interestingly, the one sprinkling the ash mixture became impure himself.}

<sup>53</sup> *Devarim* 4:4.

On the other hand, the first verse does have an advantage over the second. (In fact, on the contrary, this verse, being **first**, serves as the primary proof-text.) It is this verse specifically which speaks of a Jew's essence imparting purity, as discussed.

## 9.

### PURIFYING THE IMPURE

True, purification that comes from Above — as a result of the essential connection {between Hashem and the Jewish people} as explained — is reflected primarily by the sprinkling which purifies a person from corpse impurity. Nonetheless, purity conferred by immersion in a *mikvah* also contains a small measure of this sort of purification. This, in fact, is the novel insight of Rabbi Akiva's teaching, "Just as a *mikvah* purifies the impure, so, too, **the Holy One, blessed is He**, purifies Israel." This purity of a *mikvah* also comes from, "**the Holy One, blessed is He** {who} purifies Israel."

On this basis, we can explain another nuance in Rabbi Akiva's words: "Just as a *mikvah* purifies the **impure**." Seemingly, the words, "the impure," are superfluous! Rabbi Akiva could have said, "Just as a *mikvah* purifies, so too, the Holy One, blessed is He, purifies"!

The explanation:

According to the law,<sup>54</sup> a *mikvah* can purify even "partial" impurity. Meaning, even if a person has contracted an **additional** {more severe type of} impurity from which the *mikvah* cannot purify him, nonetheless, immersion in a *mikvah* still purifies him of the lesser impurity.

Rabbi Akiva chose his words carefully: "Just as a *mikvah* purifies the **impure, so, too**, the Holy One, blessed is He, purifies Israel." (This hints that:) Just as a *mikvah* purifies even someone who remains impure after immersing, i.e., the *mikvah* provides partial purity, **similarly**, "the Holy One, blessed is He,

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<sup>54</sup> *Berachos* ch. 3 *Mishnah* 6.



purifies Israel.” A Jew should not think to himself that when he repents for only some of his sins, Hashem will not accept his partial repentance. Rather, just as a *mikvah* purifies the impure (even when they retain a degree of impurity afterwards), so, too, Hashem purifies the Jewish people even when they remain impure, G-d forbid, from other sins.

The reason why this is so is because it is “**the Holy One, blessed is He** {who} purifies Israel.” The purity effected by a *mikvah* does not, ultimately, come about as a result of a Jew’s *avodah*. Rather, it derives from **Hashem**, i.e., from the **essential** connection between Hashem and the Jewish people. Therefore, this manner of purification has no limitations. It pervades all places and situations, and is effective even for someone who after this purification will still retain other sorts of impurity. For him, too, “the Holy One, blessed is He, purifies Israel.”

## 10.

### THE DIRECTIVE

This, then, is the wonderous directive from Rabbi Akiva’s teaching:

A Jew may approach Hashem and beg: “I have no (energy, and therefore, no) time to regret all my sins. But I do have a few free minutes. I confess and regret some of the harsher sins which distress me tremendously.” He might think that Hashem will not accept such repentance. Rabbi Akiva says: No! “How fortunate are you, Israel!” For when Hashem sees that a Jew merely inclines himself to return to Him, no matter how, Hashem immediately grants atonement, “the Holy One, blessed is He, purifies Israel.”

Afterwards, Hashem assists<sup>55</sup> a Jew, by having “one *mitzvah* lead to the next.”<sup>56</sup> Eventually, he will rid himself of all his sins until he reaches the level of a *baal teshuvah*,<sup>57</sup> a level that even perfectly righteous *tzadikim* cannot attain.<sup>58</sup>

-Based on a talk delivered on the 6<sup>th</sup> of *Tishrei*, 5731 (1970)

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<sup>55</sup> As the *Talmud* writes (*Shabbos* 104a) “If he comes in order to become purified, not only is he allowed to do so, but they, in Heaven, assist him.” And in *Tanya, Iggeres Hatshuva* ch. 11 (p. 100b) he points out, “If he comes,’ i.e., **immediately** when he comes.”

<sup>56</sup> *Pirkei Avos*, ch. 4 *Mishnah* 2.

<sup>57</sup> {Lit., ‘a possessor of return’; the term *baal teshuvah* refers to an individual who has sinned in the past, has regretted his behavior, and turned himself around, resolving never to repeat his sins.}

<sup>58</sup> *Berachos* 34b. *Rambam Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Tshuvah* ch. 7, section 4. See *Sefer Hama’amorim* 5709, p. 183 in the footnote. See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol 14, p. 361 and on.