

Likkutei Sichos

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How a Lover Confesses

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Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation while maintaining readability. As in all translations, however, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists.

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¹ And *siyyum* of tractate *Yoma*.

1.

A DISPUTE IN THE *YERUSHALMI*

At the end of tractate *Yoma* in the *Yerushalmi*, there is a dispute regarding confession on Yom Kippur:²

It was taught, “He must specify his sins” (when confessing); this is the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah ben Beseira.” [The *Bavli* has the version: “ben Bava.”]³ Rabbi Akiva says, “He does not need to specify his sins.”

Subsequently, the *Yerushalmi* continues (and concludes the tractate with the following):

“The mikveh of Israel is Hashem....”⁴ Just as a mikveh purifies the impure, the Holy One purifies Israel. Thus (it) says,⁵ “I will sprinkle upon you purifying water, and you shall become pure. I will purify you from all your impurity and from all your idols.”

This needs to be clarified: What is the connection between these two subjects, namely, the dispute over whether or not “he must specify his sins” and the teaching, “The mikveh of Israel....’ Just as a mikveh purifies.... Thus (it) says, ‘I will sprinkle... I will purify you....’” After all, the *Yerushalmi* brings these teachings in succession, so there must be a link.

Understood simply, the tractate’s conclusion, “The mikveh...,” is connected with the mishnah and is placed here to conclude {the tractate} on a positive note. (However, it has no connection with the immediately preceding discussion). Nonetheless, as noted many times,⁶ since everything in Torah is precise, it is more elegant to say that the Gemara concludes specifically with **this** particular message because it is connected with the adjacent topic.

Concerning the conclusion itself, the following is unclear:

As mentioned, the teaching in the Gemara — “The mikveh of Israel...” — is cited in the mishnah. In the words of the mishnah:

Rabbi Akiva said, “How fortunate are you, Israel! Before whom are you purified, and by whom are you purified? Your Heavenly Father, as the verse says, ‘I {Hashem} will sprinkle purifying water upon you, etc.’ As it says, ‘The mikveh of Israel is Hashem.’ Just as a mikveh purifies the impure, the Holy One purifies Israel.”

² {*Yerushalmi*, “*Yoma*,” ch. 8, sec. 7;} cited also (with differences) in *Yoma* 86b; *Tosefta*, *Yoma*, ch. 4, par. 14; *Yerushalmi*, “*Nedarim*,” ch. 5, par. 4.

³ *Yoma*, *ibid*.

⁴ *Yirmiyahu* 17:13.

⁵ *Yechezkel* 36:25.

⁶ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 14, p. 26; conclusion of tractate *Niddah* (based on *Maharsha’s* “*Chiddushei Aggados*”).

However, there are two (primary) differences between the words of the Gemara and those of the mishnah:

- (a) The Gemara mentions these two verses in the **opposite** order of the mishnah.
- (b) The mishnah only mentions the beginning of the verse, “I will sprinkle upon you purifying water” (whereas the conclusion of the verse is merely alluded to by “etc.”). The Gemara, in contrast, quotes the entire verse.

Since the Gemara **deviates** from the mishnah’s wording, we can infer that the Gemara’s teaching differs in some way from that of the mishnah. This calls for an explanation: What is the difference between the teachings of the mishnah and the Gemara?

We can posit that the Gemara’s teaching diverges from that of the mishnah because the Gemara’s teaching immediately follows the dispute over whether “he must specify his sins.”

2.

CLARIFYING THE DISPUTE

Let us begin by clarifying the reason behind the dispute over whether or not “he needs to specify his sins”:

The Gemara quotes verses to support these differing views. The authority that says “he needs to specify his sins” derives⁷ his opinion from the verse,⁸ “I beseech you, this nation has committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold.” The other authority, Rabbi Akiva, says, “He does not need {to specify his sins}, as the verse says,⁹ ‘Happy is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered over.’”¹⁰

Yet, as in most cases, {although scriptural support is marshaled to support both opinions, both concur that} either way, this is not a Scriptural **decree**. Furthermore, we can posit that, as in many similar cases, this dispute regarding how to interpret the verses hinges on a disagreement over **rationale**.

⁷ *Yoma*, loc. cit. (*Bavli* and *Yerushalmi*); *Tosefta*, *Yoma*, loc. cit.

⁸ *Shemos* 32:31.

⁹ *Tehillim* 32:1.

¹⁰ *Yoma* (*Bavli*), loc. cit.

*Tosafos*¹¹ clarifies this Tannaic dispute (based on a passage in the *Yerushalmi*):¹² The reason behind the view that “he needs to specify his sins” is “because of humiliation, so that he will be humiliated by his sins.” The view that “he does not need {to do so}” is so “that others will not suspect him of committing other {worse related (?) transgressions.”

We can posit that the rationale behind this dispute — whether the concern for humiliation or suspicion has priority — is as follows:

The idea that “he will be humiliated by his sins” concerns the present time — the act of **teshuvah itself**. When a person feels humiliated by his sins, his regret and resolve to repent are more profound and genuine.

In contrast, any “loss” resulting from suspicion — “{so} that others will not suspect him of committing other transgressions” — is primarily a **future** consideration, viz., the person will lose his credibility, and so forth. (Perhaps we can posit that if a person is suspected of committing other transgressions, this can lead others to call him out about them, echoing the prohibition against teasing a penitent to remember his past sins.)¹³

On this basis, the dispute hinges on the famous question¹⁴ as to whether we consider and decide a question before us now based on a situation that could (possibly) emerge in the future:

The opinion that maintains “he needs to specify his sins” maintains that since the person’s enunciation of the specific sins is relevant to **teshuvah itself** (in the present) — making it more profound and genuine — any apprehension about the future is overlooked.

In contrast, Rabbi Akiva maintains (as previously discussed at length)¹⁵ that the future must be taken into account. (In every situation, Rabbi Akiva immediately foresaw [in the present] the future results.) Therefore, even though specifying the sin in the present would lead to a deeper teshuvah, he opined that we must be mindful of any ensuing loss in the future.

¹¹ *Gittin* 35b, *Tosafos*, s.v., “*leichush*.”

¹² *Yerushalmi*, “*Nedarim*,” ch. 5, par. 4.

¹³ *Bava Metzia* 58b (mishnah); *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Teshuvah*,” ch. 7, par. 8; “*Hilchos Mechirah*,” ch. 14, par. 13; *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Choshen Mishpat*,” sec. 228, par. 4; Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Choshen Mishpat*,” “*Hilchos Onaah*,” sec. 28.

¹⁴ See *Sdei Chemed*, “*Klalim*,” sec. “*Zayin*,” par. 1; “*Asifas Dinim*,” “*Yom HaKippurim*,” sec. 1, par. 10 (for reference *Lekach Tov* — Rabbi Yosef Engel — sec. 6, par. 3); see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 15, p. 453ff.; vol. 16, p. 398ff; vol. 19, p. 70, 73ff.

¹⁵ *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 19, p. 70, 73ff. — while clarifying the two stories at the end of tractate *Makkos*.

3.

LEVELS OF TESHUVAH

According to **this** explanation of Rabbi Akiva's view, a practical difference arises: The instruction not to specify one's sins aloud applies specifically when others might overhear. But a person **must** still confess his sins quietly, even according to Rabbi Akiva.¹⁶

Nonetheless, Rabbi Akiva's indeterminate wording implies that one must not specify his sins even quietly.¹⁷

Another explanation of Rabbi Akiva's view is possible, one that is also related to Rabbi Akiva's outlook that consideration for future events outweighs the present situation:

Teshuvah has many levels, generally divided into two levels (in the Talmud's lexicon): teshuvah out of fear and teshuvah out of love.

We can posit that the above issue regarding the necessity of specifying the sin hinges on the difference between these two manners of teshuvah:

Regarding teshuvah motivated by fear, it makes sense to say that a person must specify his sins. This is because, since his teshuvah is "out of fear" — to protect himself from punishment (or to receive a reward)¹⁸ — it is essential to differentiate between the transgressions for which he is repenting: The fear engendered by a severe transgression, which carries a severe punishment, cannot be compared to the fear engendered by a light transgression, which carries a lesser punishment. Therefore, "he needs to specify his sins" because if he does not, his fear will not reflect the sin's severity, and consequently, his regret will be lacking.

In contrast, regarding teshuvah **out of love** — where he is not thinking about punishment, but rather, his love and **connection** with Hashem are what concern him¹⁹ — there is not (such) a difference as to what transgression is spoken of. This is because, from this perspective, all transgressions are equivalent. Light transgressions are like severe ones. Every transgression, even the smallest, interposes (the opposite of love) between a person and

¹⁶ As *Beis Yosef* states in his commentary on *Tur*, "Orach Chaim," sec. 607: see *Pri Chadash* on "Orach Chaim," sec. 607, sub-par. 2.

¹⁷ As *Meiri* writes in *Chibbur HaTeshuvah*, discourse 1, sec. 10; see *Pri Chadash*, loc. cit.

¹⁸ See *Mishneh Torah*, "Hilchos Teshuvah," ch. 10, par. 1, where Rambam explains the term "one who serves out of fear."

¹⁹ See *Mishneh Torah*, "Hilchos Teshuvah," ch. 10, par. 5; see also par. 2, loc. cit.) where Rambam explains that one who serves Hashem out of love is one who does so for **Hashem's sake**.

Hashem..²⁰ Thus, “He does not need to specify his sins” because, in this context, nothing is to be gained by **specifying** the sin.²¹

4.

CLARIFYING THE DISPUTE

On this basis, we can clarify the dispute between Rabbi Yehudah ben Beseira and Rabbi Akiva. To preface:

As elucidated on another occasion,²² all forms of teshuvah share the same fundamental **point**. Even the lowest form of teshuvah involves (as its name implies) a person returning to Hashem. The inner core {of teshuvah} manifests in the case of teshuvah out of love, for the Jew repents to connect with Hashem. Concerning teshuvah motivated by only the fear of punishment, this is because of the interposition of the evil inclination — “His evil inclination overpowered him”²³ — and it is suppressed. Yet, the inner core of this form of teshuvah is also the soul’s return to Hashem.

Therefore, according to Rabbi Akiva’s view that future events influence the present — Rabbi Akiva “sees” in the present moment the inner core that will emerge in the future — he also sees the inner core of teshuvah, such that even if a person is holding only at the lowest level of teshuvah (teshuvah motivated by fear), he already has “in potential” and inwardly {reached the level of} teshuvah motivated by love (where the transgression at hand is not [so] relevant, as discussed above). Therefore, Rabbi Akiva maintains that a person does not need to specify his sins.

5.

TWO METHODS OF STUDY

Based on **this** clarification of Rabbi Akiva’s view — that his position, “He does not need to specify his sins,” is related to his view that future considerations outweigh the here-and-now — something else, in a similar context, is clarified:

²⁰ See, at length, *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 20ff.

²¹ We can posit that, on the contrary, specifying the sin, which emphasizes the specific aspect of the transgression, “conceals” the **general** {and fundamental} aspect of it, whereby the person becomes separated from Hashem.

²² Printed in *Likkutei Biurim LeTanya*, vol. 2, pp. 112ff.

²³ Rambam’s wording in *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Geirushin*,” end of ch. 2.

Rambam rules, “He needs to specify the sin,”²⁴ which does not follow Rabbi Akiva’s view. Commentators ask:²⁵ Given the rule²⁶ that in a dispute, Jewish law follows the view of Rabbi Akiva over his colleagues, why doesn’t Rambam rule like Rabbi Akiva?

Kesef Mishnah answers that this anomaly can be explained based on the Gemara (in the *Bavli*),²⁷ which quotes a statement of Rav Yehudah in the name of Rav:

It says,²⁸ “Happy is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered over,” and “He who covers up his sins will not succeed.”²⁹ {How are these verses reconciled? The Gemara answers:} It is not a question. One verse applies to a publicized sin; and the other, to a non-publicized sin.

This statement only aligns with Rabbi Yehudah ben Bava’s view (that specifying the sin is necessary) since “according to the view of Rabbi Akiva, it is also not necessary {to specify the sin} even for a public sin.” Thus, “since Rav follows Rabbi Yehudah Ben Bava’s opinion, Rambam rules accordingly.”

Based on this explanation, it follows that according to the *Yerushalmi* — where it does **not** mention Rav’s statement mentioned above — Jewish law follows Rabbi Akiva (as Jewish law follows Rabbi Akiva over his colleagues).³⁰

On this basis, the reason behind the dispute between the *Bavli* and the *Yerushalmi* over whether or not Jewish law follows Rabbi Akiva is understood. This is because, as discussed many times,³¹ we encounter multiple places where *Bavli*’s view is that the present outweighs the future, while *Yerushalmi*’s view is that we consider a future situation in the present.

[This is connected with the different manners of study of the *Bavli* and the *Yerushalmi*:

Talmud Bavli is called “in darkness”³² since its study methodology resembles a person in a dark place. The conclusion is only reached through debate, questions, etc., which shroud the truth. In contrast, the *Yerushalmi* resembles a person in a well-illuminated place. There is little debate; the correct conclusion can be immediately seen.

²⁴ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Teshuvah*,” ch. 2, par. 3; see *Hagahos Maimonis*, ad loc..

²⁵ *Kesef Mishneh* and *Lechem Mishneh* on *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Teshuvah*,” ch. 2, par. 3; **et al.**

²⁶ *Eruvin* 46b.

²⁷ *Yoma* 86b.

²⁸ *Tehillim* 32:1.

²⁹ *Mishlei* 28:13.

³⁰ Nevertheless, Rambam doesn’t rule according to Rabbi Akiva since Jewish law follows the the *Bavli* over the *Yerushalmi*.

³¹ *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, p. 1337-8; vol. 15, p. 453ff.; vol. 24, p. 173ff.

³² *Sanhedrin* 24a; see at length *Shaarei Orah*, “*Bechaf Hei Bekislev*,” ch. 54ff.; et al.

Therefore, in *Bavli* — a state of “darkness” — the focus is primarily on the present situation and not on the future, as the future is concealed; it is not seen in (the “darkness” of) the present. In contrast, in the *Yerushalmi*, where everything is “illuminated,” the future is already foreseen in the present. Consequently, the future impacts the present.]

Similarly, in our discussion, according to *Bavli*, where the present prevails, Jewish law accords with the position of Rabbi Yehudah ben Bava that a person needs to specify his sin. In contrast, according to the *Yerushalmi*, where the future prevails over the present, Jewish law accords with the position of Rabbi Akiva that “he does not need to specify his sins.”

6.

CLARIFYING THE VERSES

On this basis, we can also understand the end of tractate *Yoma* (in the *Yerushalmi*): “The verse says, ‘The mikveh of Israel is Hashem...’, and so (it) says, ‘I will sprinkle..., and you shall become pure’” (and its connection with the dispute over the necessity for a person to specify his sins):

The difference between these two verses — “The mikveh of Israel is Hashem” and “I will sprinkle upon you purifying water” — can be clarified (based on the remarks of several commentators)³³ as follows:

“**I will sprinkle** upon you purifying water” refers to the Divine assistance to help a Jew repent — “The Holy One awakens their hearts to teshuvah.”³⁴ In contrast, “The mikveh of Israel is Hashem” signifies the teshuvah in which a **Jew** engages. (This closely resembles the purification process through a mikveh: he shall come into the water; he immerses himself in a mikveh).³⁵

In this light, the mishnah’s order is understood — first citing the verse, “I will sprinkle upon you...,” and subsequently, “The mikveh of Israel is Hashem” — as this mirrors the order of teshuvah:

Before a person repents, he is **distant** from Hashem, “Your sins separate”³⁶ between the individual and Hashem. In this state, it is unlikely that he will awaken on his own to

³³ *Tosfos Yom Tov* on the mishnah in *Yoma* (85b); see *Maharsha’s Chidushei Aggados* on *Yoma* 85b; *Yeffei Maareh, Korban HaEidah* on *Yerushalmi*, “*Yoma*,” ch. 8, par. 7; see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 17, p. 179.

³⁴ The wording of *Korban HaEidah* on *Yerushalmi*, “*Yoma*,” ch. 8, par. 7.

³⁵ See *Maharsha’s Chidushei Aggados* and *Tosfos Yom Tov*, loc. cit.

³⁶ *Yeshayahu* 59:2.

repent. Therefore, the process begins with Divine assistance — “**I will sprinkle upon you purifying water.**” Hashem sprinkles thoughts of teshuvah on a Jew from above.

However, the intention is not only for the individual to remain with this Divinely inspired teshuvah. Instead, this is meant to lead him to **toil** in his purification. Hence, the mishnah continues, “The mikveh of Israel is Hashem,” referring to purification achieved through the mikveh by a person’s own *avodah*.³⁷

On this basis, the reason the mishnah only quotes (in the first verse) the words, “I will sprinkle upon you purifying water,” and **not** the words, “and you shall become pure...,” is understood: The emphasis of the first verse is on the **Divine** inspiration (“I will sprinkle”) and not as much about “you shall become pure,” which primarily refers to the Jewish people’s purification. This thought — that a person must purify himself — is conveyed by the statement, “The **mikveh** of Israel is Hashem.”

7.

ALL FORMS OF TESHUVAH ARE ONE

From the above discussion, it is understood that the Gemara’s alteration in the order of the verses is substantive:

The mishnah discusses the phrase, “I will sprinkle,” which comes before a person begins repenting. However, in the Gemara, where the verse, “I will sprinkle...” is mentioned **after** the verse “the mikveh of Israel is Hashem” and its effect, we must say that the verse, “I will sprinkle” also pertains to a person’s **avodah of teshuvah**. [Therefore, the Gemara quotes the entire verse, including “**and you shall become pure,**” which emphasizes the Jewish people’s *avodah* of teshuvah.] Moreover, this represents an even **higher** level of teshuvah than the teshuvah alluded to by the verse, “the mikveh of Israel” on its own, which is why it is mentioned after “the mikveh of Israel.”

We can posit the following explanation: “I will sprinkle” refers to the purification process through **sprinkling**,³⁸ which is connected with living waters — specifically, the highest mode of purification (which has the power to purify a person from corpse impurity).

³⁷ {Divine service.}

³⁸ See *Maharsha’s Chiddushei Agaddos* (and other commentaries), loc. cit.; *Tzafnas Paneiach* on *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Teshuvah*,” ch. 2, par. 2; see also *Likkutei Sichos*, op. cit., p. 179ff.

This is what the Gemara alludes to. After a Jew completes his *avodah* to the best of his ability (his teshuvah resembles immersion in a mikveh), Hashem uplifts a Jew to the highest form of teshuvah (analogous to the purification of “I will sprinkle” — living waters).

This is the connection between this idea and the preceding dispute: First, the Gemara records the dispute between Rabbi Yehudah ben Beseira and Rabbi Akiva regarding whether a person needs to specify his sins. Rabbi Akiva’s view (as mentioned in Section 4) is that within every form of teshuvah, even the lowest, there is the potential to reach the highest — teshuvah out of love. Accordingly, a person need not specify his sin.

To illustrate this idea, the Gemara mentions the teaching, “‘The mikveh of Israel...’ **and so** (it) says, ‘I will sprinkle upon you purifying water, and you shall become pure. I will purify you from all your impurity and from all your idols.’” From this {sequence of verses}, we see that from the very inception of his return to Hashem, a person will achieve the **highest** form of teshuvah: “I will sprinkle.” This is because, at their core, all forms of teshuvah have one point: to return unto Hashem.

— From talks delivered on *Vav Tishrei* and *Yud Gimmel Tishrei*, 5742 (1981)