

SICHA SUMMARY

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 29

Yom Hakippurim

The Question:

In his laws of Teshuva, Rambam highlights the unique opportunity, and obligation, of Yom Kippur:

“Yom Kippur is the time of Teshuvah for all, both individuals and the community at large. It is the apex of forgiveness and pardon for Israel. Accordingly, everyone is obligated to repent and confess on Yom Kippur.” (*Laws of Teshuva, 2:7*)

Yet the mitzvah of Teshuva does not have a fixed time, it devolves on a person the moment they commit a sin, as Rambam writes in his preface to these laws, “This text describes one mitzvah; that a sinner should repent from his sin before G-d and confess.”

What differentiates the teshuva of Yom Kippur from the standard year round teshuva?

The Explanation:

The standard obligation to repent is attached to the individual who sinned. That

person’s action invites upon himself the obligation to repent. But Yom Kippur operates differently. As a result of the sanctity of the day, a new expectation and obligation is applied universally, “[it] is the time of Teshuvah **for all**... Accordingly, **everyone is obligated** to repent and confess on Yom Kippur.”

While, normally, only those who possess unrepented sins are required to repent, the time of Yom Kippur itself creates an obligation that applies to everyone, even to those who do not currently have sins.

Thus Rambam continues: “Sins which were confessed on one Yom Kippur should be confessed on another Yom Kippur even though one remains steadfast in his repentance, as Psalms 51:5 states: “I acknowledge my transgressions and my sins are always before me.” (Ibid, 2:8)

This can be understood as the Alter Rebbe explains the phenomenon of continuous repentance. As a person advances higher in their spiritual consciousness, yesterday’s repentance becomes inadequate. Even actions that didn’t warrant repentance in one’s previous state might demand repentance in their loftier station.

G-d designated Yom Kippur as a sacred time which reveals the essential bond they share with G-d. As a result, a new obligation of repentance is created, one that is not derived from the person's action, but from the time that G-d fashioned.

On a deeper level: Teshuva itself transcends the constraints of time — it does not take place within time, it can occur in an

infinitesimal moment. Yet, on Yom Kippur, G-d embeds this higher-than-time tool within the constraints of time — “Yom Kippur is the time of tesuva.” This mirrors the paradox of the Jewish people themselves who, on Yom Kippur, are “higher than the angels” yet are very much planted within the physical world.
