



## YOM KIPPUR

THERE'S ALWAYS ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

*It's Not Just Something Your Therapist Says. Your Soul Demands It.*

# HOLIDAY OVERVIEW

## *Yom Kippur*

Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year—the day on which we are closest to G-d and to the quintessence of our own souls. It is the Day of Atonement—“For on this day He will forgive you, to purify you, that you will be cleansed from all your sins before G-d” (Leviticus 16:30).

For nearly twenty-six hours—from several minutes before sunset on 9 Tishrei to after nightfall on 10 Tishrei—we “afflict our souls”: we abstain from food and drink, do not wash or anoint our bodies, do not wear leather footwear, and abstain from marital relations.

Before Yom Kippur, we perform the *kaparot* atonement service. We request and receive honey cake, in acknowledgment that we are all recipients in G-d’s world and in prayerful hope for a sweet and abundant year. We also eat a festive meal, immerse in a *mikveh*, and give extra charity. In the late afternoon, we eat the pre-fast meal, following which we bless our children, light a memorial candle as well as the holiday candles, and go to the synagogue for the Kol Nidrei service.

In the course of Yom Kippur, we hold five prayer services:

Maariv, with its solemn Kol Nidrei service, on the eve of Yom Kippur; Shacharit—the morning prayer, which includes a reading from Leviticus followed by the Yizkor memorial service; Musaf, which includes a detailed account of the Yom Kippur Temple service; Minchah, which includes the reading of the Book of Jonah; and Ne’ilah, the “closing of the gates” service at sunset. We say the *al chet* confession of sins eight times in the course of Yom Kippur and recite Psalms during every available moment.

# HOLIDAY OVERVIEW

## *Yom Kippur*

The day is the most solemn of the year, yet an undertone of joy suffuses it: a joy that revels in the spirituality of the day and expresses the confidence that G-d will accept our repentance, forgive our sins, and seal our verdict for a year of life, health, and happiness.

The closing Ne'ilah service climaxes with the resounding cries of "Hear O Israel . . . G-d is One." Then joy erupts in song and dance (a Chabad custom is to sing the lively "Napoleon's March"), followed by a single blast of the shofar, followed by the proclamation, "Next year in Jerusalem." We then

partake of a festive after-fast meal, making the evening after Yom Kippur a *yom tov* (festival) in its own right.

# TEXT 1A

*Maimonides, Mishneh  
Torah, Laws of Teshuvah  
2:7*

יום הכפורים הוא זמן תשובה לכל, ליחיד ולרבים,  
והוא קץ מחילה וסליחה לישראל. לפיכך חייבים  
הכל לעשות תשובה ולהתודות ביום הכפורים.

Yom Kippur is the time of *teshuvah* for all, both for 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.

# TEXT 1B

*Maimonides, ibid. 2:6*

אף על פי שהתשובה והצעקה יפה לעולם, בעשרה  
הימים שבין ראש השנה ויום הכפורים היא יפה  
ביותר ומתקבלת היא מיד, שנאמר: "דרשו ה'  
בהמצאו" (ישעיה נה, ו).

Even though repentance and calling out to G-d are always desirable, they are even more desirable during the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. They will be accepted immediately, as the verse states, "Seek G-d when He is to be found" (Isaiah 55:6).



There is a proactive obligation to do *teshuvah* on Yom Kippur.

# TEXT 2

*Rabbi Yonah of Gerona,  
Shaarei Teshuvah 2:14*

ומצות עשה מן התורה להעיר אדם את רוחו לחזור  
בתשובה ביום הכפורים, שנאמר: "מכל חטאתיכם  
לפני ה' תטהרו" (ויקרא טז, ל).

It's a proactive obligation from the Torah for each person to rouse their spirit and return to G-d with *teshuvah* on Yom Kippur, as the verse states, "Before G-d, you shall be cleansed from all your sins" (Leviticus 16:30).

# TEXT 3

*Yom Kippur Machzor*

עַל חַטָּא נְשַׁחֲטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּאִנּוּס וּבְרָצוֹן.

For the sin we committed before You under compulsion and willingly.

וְעַל חַטָּא נְשַׁחֲטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּאִמּוּץ הַלֵּב.

And for the sin we committed before You by callously hardening the heart.

עַל חַטָּא נְשַׁחֲטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּבִלִי דַעַת.

For the sin we committed before You inadvertently.

וְעַל חַטָּא נְשַׁחֲטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּבִטּוּי שְׂפָתַיִם.

And for the sin we committed before You with an utterance of the lips.

עַל חַטָּא נְשַׁחֲטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּגִלּוּי עֲרִיּוֹת.

For the sin we committed before You in sexual immorality.

וְעַל חַטָּא נְשַׁחֲטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּגִלּוּי וּבִסְתֵּר.

And for the sin we committed before You openly and secretly.

עַל חַטָּא נְשַׁחֲטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּדַעַת וּבְמִרְמָה.

For the sin we committed before You with knowledge and with deceit.

וְעַל חַטָּא נְשַׁחֲטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּדַבּוּר פֶּה.

And for the sin we committed before You through [misuse of our power of] speech.



Each year we repeat a long list of confessions, two offenses for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, banging our chest for each one.



# TEXT 4

*Rabbi Moshe of Trani, Beit  
Elokim, Shaar Hateshuvah,  
ch. 6*

אינו צריך לחזור ולשוב על מה שחטא קודם כיון  
ששב מקודם, אבל להעלותו על שפתיו בוידוי הוא  
צריך, להיותו נזכר שלא ישוב עוד כנזכר . . . אבל  
בענין התשובה, הואיל וגמר בלבו קודם שלא  
לחזור עוד אליה, ואחר כך השיאו הנחש הוא היצר  
הרע, נמלך הוא באותו שעה למה שחטא אז,  
ותשובתו הראשונה במקומה עומדת למה שחטא  
קודם.

A person isn't required to do *teshuvah* for past sins for which they have already repented. But they are certainly required to repeatedly articulate them so that they don't ever repeat the same mistakes. . . . But as far as *teshuvah* is concerned, the person has resolved never to repeat the mistake, and they have acknowledged that it was that wily snake, the Evil Tempter, who seduced them then. So, their original *teshuvah* for that sin remains in place.

# TEXT 5A

*Talmud, Yoma 86b*

רבי אליעזר בן יעקב אומר: כל שכן שהוא משובח,  
שנאמר: "כי פשעי אני אדע וחסאתי נגדי תמיד".

Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov says, "If one confesses in subsequent years, all the more so is he praiseworthy, as the verse states, 'For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me' (Psalms 51:5)."

# TEXT 5B

*Maimonides, Mishneh  
Torah, Laws of Teshuvah  
2:8*

עבירות שהתודה עליהן ביום הכפורים זה, חוזר  
ומתודה עליהן ביום הכפורים אחר, אף על פי שהוא  
עומד בתשובתו, שנאמר: "כי פשעי אני אדע  
וחטאתי נגדי תמיד" (תהלים נא, ה).

Sins confessed on one Yom Kippur should be  
confessed on another Yom Kippur even  
though one remains steadfast in their  
repentance, as the verse states, "For I know  
my transgressions, and my sin is ever before  
me."



King David tells  
us there is no  
such thing as  
completely wiping  
away sin, even  
with *teshuvah*.

# TEXT 6

*Rashi, Yoma 86b*

"וחטאתי נגדי תמיד". איני סבור שכיפרת לי, והרי  
הוא תמיד כאילו הוא נגדי עומד.

"My sin is ever before me." I don't know if  
You, G-d, have forgiven me, and so my sins  
are ever before me.

# TEXT 7A

*Isaiah 55:7*

יַעֲזֹב רָשָׁע דַּרְכּוֹ וְאִישׁ אֲוֵן מִחֻשְׁבֹּתָיו, וְיָשָׁב אֶל ה'  
וִירְחַמֵּהוּ וְאֵל אֱלֹקֵינוּ כִּי יִרְבֶּה לְסֻלּוֹת.

The wicked shall give up his way, and the man of iniquity his thoughts, and he shall return to G-d, Who shall have mercy upon him, and to our G-d, for He will freely pardon.

# TEXT 7B

*Maimonides, Mishneh  
Torah, Laws of Teshuvah  
7:3*

אל תאמר שאין תשובה אלא מעבירות שיש בהן מעשה, כגון: זנות וגזל וגניבה - אלא כשם שצריך אדם לשוב מאלו, כך הוא צריך לחפש בדעות רעות שיש לו ולשוב מן הכעס ומן האיבה, ומן הקנאה ומן ההיתול, ומרדיפת הממון והכבוד, ומרדיפת המאכלות וכיוצא בהן - מן הכל צריך לחזור בתשובה.

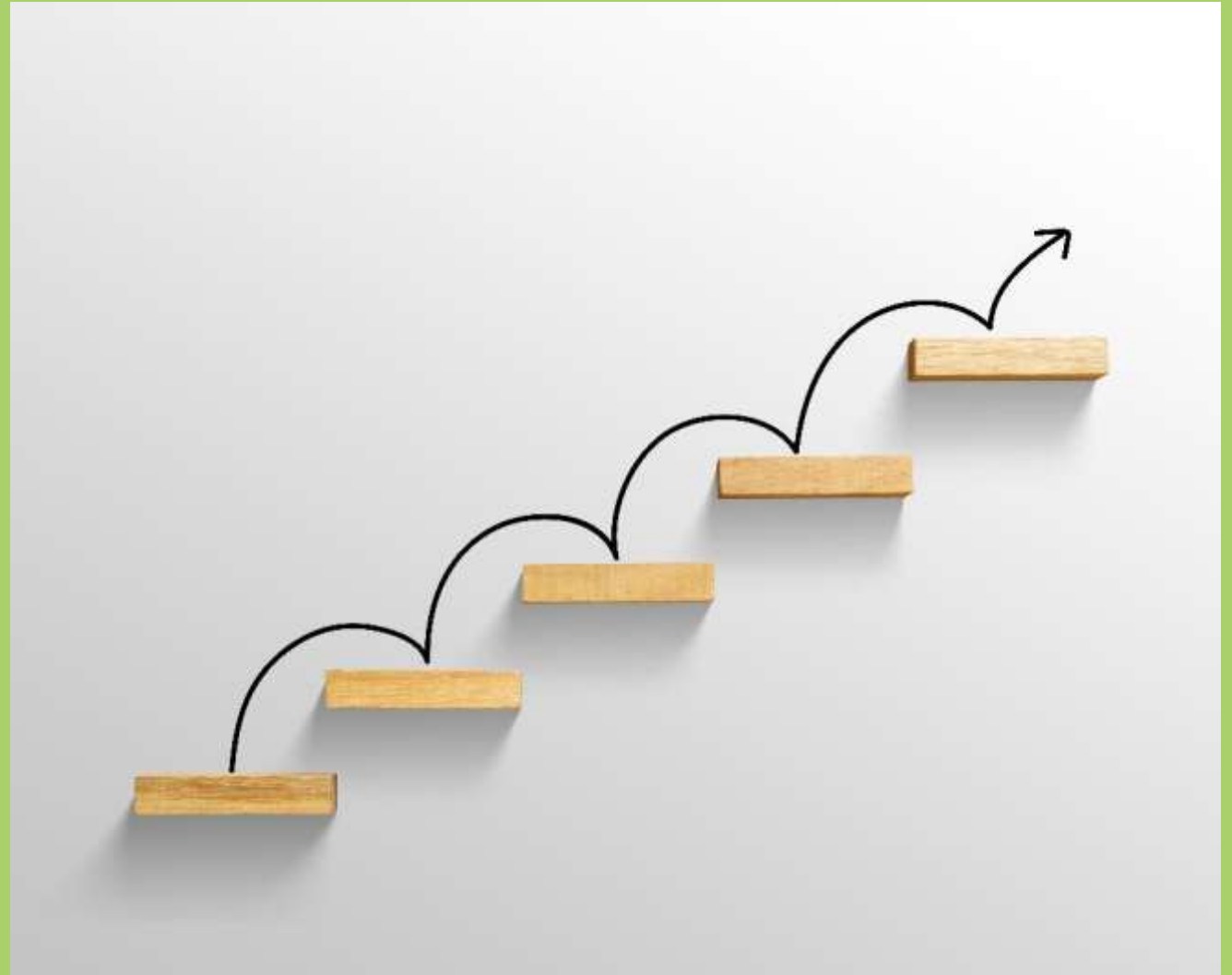
ואלו העונות קשים מאותן שיש בהן מעשה, שבזמן שאדם נשקע באלו קשה הוא לפרוש מהם. וכן הוא אומר: "יעזוב רשע דרכו ואיש און מחשבותיו" (ישעיה נה, ז).

A person should not think that repentance is only necessary for sins involving deeds such as promiscuity, robbery, or theft. Rather, just as a person must repent from these, so must he search for his evil character traits. He must repent from anger, hatred, envy, frivolity, the pursuit of money and honor, gluttony, and the like. He must repent for all [of the above].

These sins are more difficult than those involving deed. If a person is attached to these, it is harder for him to separate himself. In this context, the verse states, "May the wicked abandon his path and the crooked man his designs" (Isaiah 55:7).



We must ask ourselves every day: “What did I do to refine my inner self? What did I do today to improve who I was yesterday?”



# TEXT 8A

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman of  
Liadi, Tanya, Likutei  
Amarim, ch. 29*

ואף שכבר עשה תשובה נכונה - הרי עיקר  
התשובה בלב, והלב יש בו בחינות ומדרגות רבות,  
והכל לפי מה שהוא אדם, ולפי הזמן והמקום, כידוע  
ליודעים. ולכן עכשיו בשעה זו שרואה בעצמו דלא  
סליק ביה נהורא דנשמתא - מכלל שהיום לא  
נתקבלה תשובתו ועונותיו מבדילים, או שרוצים  
להעלותו לתשובה עילאה יותר מעומקא דליבא  
יותר.

ולכן אמר דוד: "וחטאתי נגדי תמיד".

It could very well be that one has done complete *teshuvah*. Still, it's not enough, for *teshuvah* is primarily a duty of the heart, and the heart has many layers and complexities—each person according to the conditions of their era and environment. So, when a person observes that they are still spiritually numb, that is an indication that their *teshuvah* has not been accepted, and their past sins obstruct between them and G-d. A deeper level of *teshuvah* is necessary, from a deeper pocket of the heart.

Thus, David said, “My sins remain ever before me.”

# TEXT 8B

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman of  
Liadi, Tanya, Igeret  
Hateshuvah, ch. 11*

ומה שכתוב: "וחטאתי נגדי תמיד", אין המכוון להיות תמיד עצב נבזה חס ושלום, דהא כתיב בתריה: "תשמיעני ששון ושמחה וכו' ורוח נדיבה תסמכני וכו'". . . .

אלא "נגדי" דייקא . . . . ופירש רש"י: "מרחוק". והמכוון רק לבלתי רום לבבו, ולהיות שפל רוח בפני כל האדם, כשיהיה לזכרון בין עיניו שחטא נגד ה'.

When the verse states, “My sins remain ever before me,” it does not mean one should always be depressed and diminished. After all, just a few verses later, it states, “Make me hear joy and gladness” (Psalms 51:10).

Rather, the sin must be “before me,” . . . which Rashi interprets as “from a distance.” The idea is to keep one from getting too arrogant and, instead, to maintain a sense of humility relative to all other people. This is the result of keeping one’s sin constantly before them.



We need to focus on serving G-d with joy. Anything that detracts from joy, including thoughts about past or present sins, is unholy and unwelcome.

# TEXT 9

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei Sichot  
29, pp. 208–209*

דער חילוק אין דעם איז נאר: ווען די סיבת החיוב לעשות תשובה איז דער מצב (חטא) האדם — איז אויב דער אדם האט (ניט חוטא געווען, אדער) שוין תשובה געטאן אויפן חטא, (ער האט עוזב געווען דעם חטא, וואס דאס "בלבד" איז "מצות התשובה מן התורה") איז ניטא אויף אים קיין חיוב נאכאמאל צו נתעורר ווערן בתשובה על חטא זה (אף על פי וואס "וחטאתי נגדי תמיד").

ביום הכפורים אבער, וואס דער זמן איז מחייב תשובה, און עס לייגט זיך א חיוב אויף "הכל לעשות תשובה" — איז אויב ס'איז געווען בחייו אן ענין אויף וועלכן ס'איז מעגלעך תשובה, איז מען אין דעם מחוייב, וויבאלד "וחטאתי נגדי תמיד", ובמילא איז דאס שייך צו יעדערן — "חייבים הכל לעשות תשובה" כנזכר לעיל.

Here's the distinction: When the reason for *teshuvah* is contingent upon the person and their sins, then in situations where the person either didn't sin or already performed adequate *teshuvah*, there is no further obligation to do *teshuvah* for that sin. This is despite the fact that, in theory, the sin "remains ever before me" because adequate *teshuvah*, in the legal sense, is defined as simply "abandoning sin."

On Yom Kippur, however, it is the time that places an obligation of *teshuvah* upon the person, not anyone's personal affairs. Accordingly, if there was anything in one's life that ever required *teshuvah*, they must do *teshuvah* again. Inasmuch as the sin "remains ever before me," this type of *teshuvah* applies to everyone.



We are dressed in white because we are angelic, and our souls shine on this day. This spiritual promotion means that you have the potential to understand and feel a deeper connection to G-d.



# TEXT 10

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, ibid.*

מצד מעלת היום פון יום הכפורים, וואס יעדער איד  
ווערט נתעלה כו', איז אפילו די ענינים אויף  
וועלכע מ'האט שוין פריער תשובה געטאן א  
"תשובה נכונה", דארף מען ביום הכפורים האבן א  
העכערע תשובה.

בסגנון אחר קצת: מצד דעם עליה פון א אידן ביום  
הכפורים, פאדערט זיך תשובה אויף ענינים וואס  
פאר יום הכפורים (ווען ער איז געווען אין א  
נידעריקערער מדריגה בעבודת ה') זיינען זיי (לגבי  
המדריגה ההיא) ניט פאררעכנט געווארן ווי  
חטאים.

On Yom Kippur, every Jew is elevated to new heights. As such, even if one did adequate *teshuvah* for something in the past, on Yom Kippur, they must do a deeper, higher level of *teshuvah*.

In other words: Yom Kippur renders a Jew more spiritually attuned. As such, things that in the past, before Yom Kippur, would not have been considered a sin are now considered as such. Accordingly, one must do *teshuvah*.

# TEXT 11

*David Weiss, “Who Is a Chasid?”*

*[www.chabad.org/4041956](http://www.chabad.org/4041956)*

*Professor David Weiss was an assistant professor in the Department of Immunology and Bacteriology at the University of California in Berkeley. After a trip to the Soviet Union in 1965, he had an audience with the Rebbe. He relayed most of the discussion in the interview, and here’s the end of the conversation:*

At the end of the audience, I was so profoundly impressed that I was moved to say to the Rebbe, “I am not as exacting in my Torah observance as some others. I do pray three times a day, but not always with a minyan. And I am not always as careful about observing the commandments as the people who are your emissaries. But I would just like to know: Who can call himself one of your Chasidim?” . . .

He responded, “It’s very simple. . . . Somebody who can say at the end of the day that he has advanced a small step higher than he was at the beginning of the day, I would be happy to call that person a Chasid of mine.”

His statement contained a very powerful message. And ever since then, I have tried—though I have not always succeeded—to be the kind of person who is able to look back at the end of the day and say, “I’ve risen today by a small step.”





No matter how much of a “good person” we think we are, yesterday’s good isn’t good enough for today, and certainly not for tomorrow.

## KEY POINTS

1. There is a unique mitzvah to do *teshuvah* on Yom Kippur, in addition to the mitzvah to do so the entire year.
2. Everyone must do *teshuvah* on Yom Kippur.
3. Every year on Yom Kippur, we confess to a list of sins—the same list each year.
4. Some argue that this is to raise awareness and keep us from ever committing the same sin again.

## KEY POINTS

5. Another explanation, which also answers the need for (a) yearly *teshuvah*, for (b) everyone, is that *teshuvah* is relative to the person's standing. Inasmuch as people always (should) grow, past *teshuvah* efforts aren't good enough for today.
6. The idea of ever-deepening *teshuvah* explains the concept of "My sins remain ever before me."
7. An important disclaimer: while it's true that one's sins always remain, that means a "back-burner" awareness, not an overbearing, depressing one.
8. The legal definition of *teshuvah* remains "to repent for past sins." This deeper idea of *teshuvah* is only encouraged and recommended. That's throughout the year. On Yom Kippur, it becomes an obligation.

