

## Part 5 – *Kaparah* Cannot Make up for Lost Opportunities

The *Sifsei Chaim*<sup>1</sup> points out that even *kaparah* has a fundamental limitation —

Although the path of teshuva is able to rectify the violation of a *mitzvat asei* and the denigration involved in it, it is not able to restore the lacking of the mitzvah itself which was never fulfilled. *Chaza*<sup>2</sup> explain the words of the verse<sup>3</sup> — “That which is lacking can never be replaced” as referring to one who nullified the mitzvah of *Shema* or prayer [which can never be made up afterwards].

*Teshuva* cannot grant a person *mitzvot* which he never fulfilled. Rav Yechezkel Levenstein responded to a student who had been unable to learn due to *onnes* (circumstances beyond his control) — “There is an *am ha'aretz* (ignorant person) with no excuse, and an *am ha'aretz* with an excuse; you appear to be in the second group — an *am ha'aretz* with an excuse. It is possible that your excuses will be accepted and you will not be punished, but in any case, you will still not be a *lamdan* (one who learned lots of Torah)!” And with a case of real *bitul Torah* (i.e., actually choosing to waste time and not learn Torah), the teshuva [afterwards] is [certainly] not able to transform an *am ha'aretz* into a *talmid chacham* (Torah scholar).

In terms of what *Chaza*<sup>4</sup> teach, that one who did teshuva from love — “*zedonot na'asot lo k'zechuyot* — his willful *aveirot* become merits for him,” that does not mean he will get any new *mitzvot* which he never did. Rather, the willful *aveirah* created a denigration which distanced the person from Hashem. When he later returns in teshuva and merits a closeness to Hashem, that *zadon* (willful *aveirah*) will have become the cause for this closeness to Hashem, and for doing the teshuva from love. That will, therefore, become a merit for him, since the damage from the denigration became his rectification.

Rav Avigdor Miller<sup>5</sup> explains why it is necessary to hurry [to do a mitzvah] —

Because there is a great danger of losing the opportunity. If you delay doing a mitzvah, frequently when you later come around and are ready to do it, the opportunity has passed. Rav Miller then points out that the next words of the Ramchal are very striking:

“*Ki ein sakanah k'sakanaso*” — There is no peril [in the world] like this peril [of postponing a mitzvah].

The loss of failing to perform a mitzvah is [in some sense] worse than the loss of committing an *aveirah*. You can do teshuvah for an *aveirah*, but when the opportunity to perform a mitzvah is not utilized, it is lost forever, and that is the tragedy of life.

The *Mishnah* in *Avot*<sup>6</sup> states — “Run away from an *aveirah*.” You have to run from transgression like someone running from a wild animal, because the danger is very severe. There is no disaster greater than an *aveirah*. However, it also says<sup>7</sup> — “The judgment of the wicked in *Gehenom* lasts twelve months.” The negative consequences for an *aveirah* can last up to twelve months. And even if,

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<sup>1</sup> *Arba'ah Chilukei Kaparah – Teshuva al mitzvat asei*

<sup>2</sup> *Brachot* 26a

<sup>3</sup> *Kohelet* 1:15

<sup>4</sup> *Yuma* 86a

<sup>5</sup> In his commentary on *Mesillat Yesharim – Chapter 7 – Zerizus* (Alacrity)

<sup>6</sup> 4:2

<sup>7</sup> *Eduyos* 2:10, *Shabbat* 33b

when a person finally leaves this world, he goes to *Gehenom*, eventually he will come out and go on to the next world, where he will benefit from his *mitzvot* forever and ever...

The benefit for fulfilling even the smallest mitzvah, however, is infinite. So, losing out on a mitzvah is the biggest loss there could be; an eternal loss of infinite benefit.

We can conclude that man's primary purpose in this world is not to avoid *chet*, but rather to acquire *shleimut* (wholeness and completion), as the *Mesillat Yesharim* explains beforehand. *Shleimut* can only be achieved through positive actions, not through sitting idly and refraining from action. This is like someone who is taking a trip to a certain destination. Do we say that the primary purpose of his journey is to avoid accidents? Certainly, it's extremely important for him to be careful and avoid accidents, but ultimately the purpose of a journey is to reach the destination. Man does not come to this world for the purpose of avoiding *chet*; his main purpose in this life is to attain *shleimut*.

This is the meaning of what the Ramchal says, "*Ki ein sakanah k'sakanaso* — There is no peril like this peril." The danger of missing out on a mitzvah is even greater, [in some sense,] than the danger of committing an *aveirah*. This is what *Shlomo HaMelech* refers to when he says — "That which is lacking can never be replaced"<sup>8</sup>. It is impossible to replace the loss of a mitzvah, and therefore, there is no peril like that peril.

Rav Miller explains further<sup>9</sup> —

The *chatas* offering, which is an opportunity granted by Hashem to gain *kaparah* for an *aveirah* committed through negligence, is limited solely to prohibitions. But for the *aveirah* of omitting a mitzvah, even severe ones such as the *korban Pesach* and *milah*, there is no offering of a *chatas* which can be brought. We learn from this that when the opportunity to perform a mitzvah is not utilized, it is lost forever. Even though similar *mitzvot* may later become available, and even the exact same type of mitzvah can be performed afterwards, that earlier mitzvah at that specific time has gone lost forever. It must be made clear that there is actually [a limited type of] *kaparah* for a lost mitzvah. The *Gemara*<sup>10</sup> tells us that if one transgressed a *mitzvat aseï* and he did teshuva, he will get an immediate *kaparah*. Yet this *kaparah* merely removes the *aveirah* of not doing, it does not confer the merit which could have been achieved if he had actually done the mitzvah. As the *Gemara*<sup>11</sup> says, quoting the verse in *Kohelet*<sup>12</sup>, referring to a lost mitzvah — "That which is lacking can never be replaced."

Rav Aryeh Kaplan<sup>13</sup> says similarly —

More severe than a prohibition is the *aveirah* of failing to perform a *mitzvat aseï*. One must be particularly careful regarding *mitzvot aseï*, since even teshuva cannot make up the loss of merit incurred... One who habitually ignores any *mitzvat aseï* can therefore be counted among the worst of transgressors.

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<sup>8</sup> *Kohelet* 1:15

<sup>9</sup> *Kingdom of Kohanim*, pg. 52, 4:2

<sup>10</sup> *Yoma* 86a

<sup>11</sup> *Chagigah* 9a

<sup>12</sup> 1:15

<sup>13</sup> *The Handbook of Jewish Thought – Vol. 2 – 13:37, 15:63*

Teshuva only helps to remove evil, but it cannot make up for any good that has been lost. Still, when one does do teshuva out of love for G-d, all of his former wickedness is counted as good, and he can, therefore, achieve in an instant what others may need many years to attain.

## The Remarkable Need for *Kaparah*

*Chazal*<sup>14</sup> tell us that a *kaparah* is required for one who thought he or she did an *aveirah*, even if, in the end, we discover that it was not actually an *aveirah* at all. The example they bring is a woman who “violates” a *neder* or *shavua* (vow or oath) which her husband had previously nullified, without her knowledge. Even though it turns out that when she did the “violation,” the *neder* or *shavua* had already ceased to exist, this woman still needs a *kaparah* and *selicha*. This is because she had willfully done that which she *thought* was prohibited. Rebbe Akiva would cry when he reached this verse<sup>15</sup>. He said — “And if one who intended to eat pork but ended up eating kosher meat needs *kaparah* and *selicha*, one who intended to eat pork and ended up eating pork, all the more so!

Furthermore, *Chazal*<sup>16</sup> tell us that even the dead require *kaparah*!

## *Emunah* in Teshuva and Yom Kippur

The Rambam<sup>17</sup> mentions a striking requirement to be able to receive *kaparah* — “Yom Kippur, a *chatas*, and an *asham* are only *m'chapeir* on those who have done teshuva and believe in their *kaparah*. They are not *m'chapeir*, however, for one who rejects them... even if he brings the [offerings exactly] according to the mitzvah. Furthermore, [if he will later] return in teshuva from this rebellion, he will need to bring his *chatas* and *asham* [again]. And similarly, Yom Kippur will not be *m'chapeir* for one who is rebelling on Yom Kippur.”

Rav Shimshon Pinkus<sup>18</sup> discusses this requirement — Yom Kippur is also relevant to *emunah*. The Rambam rules that Yom Kippur will not be *m'chapeir* for one who doesn't believe in its *kaparah*. Even if our eyes don't see it, we need to believe that a serious change occurred within us on Yom Kippur.

The *Shulchan Aruch*<sup>19</sup> quotes a *Medrash*<sup>20</sup>, which tells us that *motzai Yom Kippur* (the night after Yom Kippur), a voice comes out from Heaven and declares — “Go and eat your bread with joy, since Hashem already views your actions favorably.” One who believes that Yom Kippur has accomplished a change within him, will see himself after Yom Kippur as an entirely different person. While issues may

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<sup>14</sup> *Gemara Nazir* 23a

<sup>15</sup> *Bamidbar* 30:9,13

<sup>16</sup> *Sifri – Shofetim* 209

<sup>17</sup> *Hilchot Sh'gagot* – 3:10

<sup>18</sup> *Sichot Rav Shimshon Pinkus – Tov v'Yashar Hashem*

<sup>19</sup> 624:5

<sup>20</sup> *Bamidbar Rabba* 17:2

still exist, like difficulty with davening (prayer) and learning, he still believes that Yom Kippur has made a change, and in the course of time, he will see a wondrous *siyata d'Shimaya* (Heavenly assistance) within him. We need to believe, even if it appears in our eyes that the world is the same world as before Yom Kippur, that *motzai Yom Kippur*, the world is a different world, and the person is a different person. Just like we believe that "*Bereshit bara Elokim* — In the beginning G-d created the world," we need to believe that "*bayom ha'zeh yechapeir aleichem l'taheir eschem* — on this day there will be a *kaparah* on you to purify yourselves." Hashem purifies us, He makes us brand new, a new creation. And if we believe it, we will be careful to protect it.