

Kaparah Part 1 — DEFINITIONS — SELICHA — MECHILA — KAPARAH

While *kaparah* is a concept we are all familiar with, how much do we really understand it? What does it mean? How does it work? How effective can it be? And what role does it play within the much larger topic of *yissurim* — difficulties and challenges in life?

Rashi¹ says:

It appears in my eyes that whenever the word *kaparah* is used with transgressions... it is always a term of *kinuach* (wiping away) and *ha'avarah* (removing).

Rashi² additionally explains that [*kaparah*] is a term of *ritzuy* (reconciliation) and *piyus* (conciliation, appeasement, rapprochement).

The *Malbim*³ writes:

Kaparah refers to the *kofer* (ransom or fine) and the *mechir* (price) which is taken for the *chet* (transgression), or the *nikayon* and *kinuach* (cleansing and wiping away). This is connected with the *kofer* [payment] which is given [for some transgressions], or the *korban* (offering).

Rav Hirsch⁴ adds:

Selichah is a **personal forgiveness** — that the *aveirah* (transgression) should not permanently damage the relationship between the transgressor and the one he transgressed against.

Mechilah is **forgiveness for the issue** — relinquishing the appropriate penalty for the transgressor. We cannot anticipate either of them unless we first do *teshuva* following our rectification of the damage, as much as possible, and we accept to be faithful with our obligations for the future. Therefore, our request for *selichah* [in our daily prayers] is only after our request for Hashem to help us to do *teshuva*.

The *Aruch HaShulchan*⁵ defines three types of transgressions — *chet*, *avon*, and *pesha*:

A *chet* is more lenient than an *avon*, since a *chet* is done *b'shogeig* (with negligence), while an *avon* is done *meizid* (willfully). And an *avon* is more lenient than a *pesha*, since a *pesha* is a rebellion [against Hashem]. But *kaparah* is greater than all of them... [*Kaparah*] is a *kinuach v'hadachah* (wiping away and cleansing)... Therefore, the day [of repair and rectification] is called Yom Kippur.

The *Siddur Shomeyah Tefillah* adds that both *selichah* and *mechilah* are expressions of forgiveness, but Ibn Ezra proves that the forgiveness of *selicha* is only partial. After the *aveirah* of the *meraglim* (spies), *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said to Moshe Rabbeinu⁶ “*Salachti kidvarecha* — I have forgiven, as you said.” However, Hashem still punished

¹ *Bereshit* 32:21

² *Devarim* 32:43

³ *Vayikra* 5

⁴ Commentary on *Tefillah* – Prayer

⁵ 607:6

⁶ *Bamidbar* 14:20

the Jews for this *chet*, declaring “they will not see the land.”⁷ Thus, *selicha* must be [only] a mitigation of punishment, not a complete forgiveness. And, in fact, being prevented from entering *eretz Yisrael* was a lesser punishment than the one Hashem had originally intended. “*Machal*,” on the other hand, is explained in many statements of *Chazal* (our Sages of blessed memory) as complete and immediate forgiveness, following from the meaning of its root “*macheh* — wipe out.”

When requesting forgiveness from Hashem we first ask for *selichah*, a temporary reprieve. Then we ask for the greater form of forgiveness, *mechilah*, which is complete and immediate. In the continuation of the *berachah* (blessing), though, we invert the order. There we recount the praises of Hashem, rather than make requests. Accordingly, we mention the greater praise, Hashem granting *mechilah*, before the lesser one of His granting *selichah*.⁸

The *sefer Sh'mah Tefilasi* asks why we only ask for *selicha* and *mechila* in our daily *tefillah* (prayer), and not also *kaparah*. The answer he quotes from his Rebbe is that there is no complete *kaparah* except on Yom Kippur, or with a *korban*.

Rav Shimshon Pinkus⁹ addresses this as well —

There are three [different] concepts — *slichah*, *mechilah*, and *kaparah*. *Selicha* seems to be that one is not demanding the payment of a debt, but the debt is still fully existent and not forgiven. In other words, *selichah* means that [the transgressor] will not suffer any negative consequences, but the debt exists, and will eventually need to be eliminated.

The concept of *mechilah*, however, is that the debt itself is forgiven, but there is still no *kaparah*. For example, one damages another and is, therefore, obligated to pay [for the damage]. If the damaged person merely gives him *selicha*, it means that he won't demand the repayment, although the debt will still exist. But if the person also gives him *mechilah*, then there is no longer any debt. But at the same time, there is no *shalom* (peace) between them, since the damage is still existent and has not been rectified at all. *Kaparah*, however, is a language of wiping away [i.e., in terms of the damage, not only the payment for that damage], as the commentaries explain in *Zevachim* 25a, and it repairs the actual damage. From this we can differentiate the different stages of *kaparah*. *Teshuva* accomplishes that Hashem gives us [*selichah* and] *mechilah*, but not more. There is no aspect of *kaparah* with this at all. And, similarly, in our *tefillah* (prayers) every day, we don't ask for *kaparah* at all, but rather “*slach lanu, machal lanu*,” since the *tefillah* and *teshuva* can [only] bring us to *selichah* and *mechilah*. But for *kaparah* we need something to facilitate it, like a *korban* (offering in the Temple), lashes, *yissurim*, or Yom Kippur, which do have the ability to give *kaparah*.

Rav Soloveitchik¹⁰ explains —

Yom Kippur has a double function. The first is *kaparah* — acquittal from *chet* — “For the quality of this very day shall acquit you of *chet*”¹¹. This was expressed in

⁷ *Bamidbar* 14:23

⁸ *Bi'ur Shemot Hanirdafim*

⁹ *Sichot Rav Shimshon Pinkus – B'inyan Chilukei Kaparah*

¹⁰ *On Repentance – Pinchas H. Peli – Acquittal and Purification*

¹¹ *Vayikra* 16:30

the prayer recited by the *Kohen Gadol* in the *Beit HaMikdash* — “Please grant acquittal (a *kaparah*) for *aveirot*.”

The second aspect of Yom Kippur is *taharah* — purification. As it is written — “For the essence of this very day shall acquit you of *chet*, to cleanse you...” This, too, was brought out in the Yom Kippur Temple service. The High Priest pronounced to the assembled people — “Before G-d, you should be cleansed.” *Chet* and its negative consequences are born together. No *chet* goes without its retribution, whether it be meted out by a terrestrial or a celestial court. The belief in positive and negative consequences is fundamental to Jewish belief.

Kaparah means forgiveness or withdrawal of claim. This is a legal concept, borrowed from the laws of property. Just as one may release his fellow man of a debt owed to him, so may G-d absolve one of a penalty to which he is liable due to *chet*. *Kaparah* removes the need for the penalty... All this concerns the liability incurred by the transgressor. The moment acquittal (*kaparah*) is granted and penalty wiped from the books, man's liability is terminated.

However, *chet* also has a polluting quality. The Jewish view recognizes a state of *tumat hachet* (spiritual impurity of the transgression). The entire *Tanach* abounds in references to this idea of self-pollution, contamination, rolling about in the mire of *chet*. This impurity makes its mark on the personality of the transgressor...

Chet, as it were, removes the divine halo from man's head, impairing his spiritual integrity.

As a result of *chet*, man is not the same person he was before. [As an example,] every man is presumed acceptable as a credible witness. Natural truthfulness is, to my way of thinking, an integral part of man's character. The moment a person transgresses he lessens his own worth, brings himself down and becomes spiritually defective, thus foregoing his former status. *Chet* deprives man of his natural privileges and unique human attributes. He is subjected to a complete transformation as his original personality departs, and another one replaces it. This is not a form of punishment, or a fine, and is not imposed in a spirit of anger, wrath or vindictiveness. It is a “metaphysical” corruption of the human personality, of the divine image of man.

Indeed, true *teshuvah* not only achieves *kaparah* (acquittal and erasure of penalty), it should also bring about *taharah* (purification) from *tum'ah* (spiritual pollution), liberating man from his hard-hearted ignorance and insensitivity. Such *teshuvah* restores man's spiritual viability and rehabilitates him to his original state.

And sometimes it [even] makes man rise to heights he never dreamed he could reach.

Rav Soloveitchik concludes —

We make two requests in the prayers of Yom Kippur — “Pardon us our *aveirot* on this Day of *Kaparah*,” and also — “Erase and pass out of your sight our *aveirot* and iniquities.” The first of these requests corresponds to the *teshuvah* of acquittal (*kaparah*), and the other to the *teshuvah* of purification.

Rav Chaim Eisen¹², makes a fascinating observation about *kaparah* —

The first four places we find the root “*kapar*” (*chaf-pey-reish*) in the Torah seem to have nothing at all to do with the conventional understanding of *kaparah* as it relates to *aveirot*:

¹² A teacher in Jerusalem

“Make an ark of gofer wood; you should make rooms in the ark, and pitch (*kofer*) it from within and on the outside with pitch (*kofer*).”¹³

“He (Yaakov) said — I will cover up [Aisav's] wrath (*achaprah panav*) with the gift.”¹⁴ Ibn Ezra explains this as *achaseh v'astir* — I will cover and hide.

The Radak says similarly — “*achaprah panav*” — *asir ka'aso* (removal of the cover) since the term *kapara* refers to removing.

“And when the layer of dew had gone up, behold, upon the surface of the desert, a thin flaky substance, thin like the frost (*kak'for*), was on the ground.”¹⁵

“And you should make a covering (*kapores*) of pure gold.”¹⁶

Ibn Ezra explains *kaparah* in this verse as — like a type of a cover... This is similar to *l'chapeir alav* — as a cover for the *chet*.

The Malbim¹⁷ writes —

Some say the concept of *kaparah* is related to *neki'ut* (cleanliness) and *kisuy* (covering), like *kaporet* which is a covering, since it covers the *chet* from being seen, even though it is not completely removed.

Rav Soloveitchik¹⁸ says similarly —

[*Kaparah*] sets up a barrier through which the negative consequences may not pass. By means of *teshuvah* and *kaparah* (acquittal), man puts a protective covering between himself and the penalty for his *chet*.

Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch also speaks about the pitch that Hashem told Noach to use to cover the ark, which the verse calls “*kofer*.” He writes¹⁹ —

The basic meaning of the root *kafar* is a protecting or restricting covering.

Protective, so that nothing from outside affects it, as here [with the ark], and so also²⁰ *kapores* (the cover of the *aron*); restrictive, that what is covered is kept in and does not affect what is outside...

In reference to *chet*, it occurs with both meanings — to protect the person, the nation, and the Sanctuary, from the effects of *aveirot* committed, and also to keep back, to prevent the *chet* from having its effects.

When a later verse²¹ says — “The *Kohen* should be *m'chapeir* for him for his *chet*, and he should be forgiven,” the literal meaning is that — “The *Kohen* should cover over his *chet* for him, and it will then be forgiven to him”...

Based on the *kaparah* which the priest accomplishes through the blood being placed on the corners of the altar, his future is not endangered by his past...and an unhindered progress in life is granted to him.

Rav Hirsch²² explains —

¹³ *Bereshit* 6:14

¹⁴ *Bereshit* 32:21

¹⁵ *Shemot* 16:14

¹⁶ *Shemot* 25:17

¹⁷ *Vayikra* 5

¹⁸ On Repentance – Pinchas H. Peli – Acquittal and Purification

¹⁹ *Bereshit* 6:14

²⁰ *Shemot* 25:17

²¹ *Vayikra* 4:26

²² *Vayikra* 23:27

Kaparah protects the transgressor from the consequences of the *chet*, stemming the consequences which otherwise would ensue from the *aveirah* on the internal and external well-being of the transgressor. It is a... fate we so deservedly should get, if not for G-d's miraculous kindness granting *kapara* to our past. Without *kapara*, which we only have due to G-d's kindness, we would not even be able to exist...

Kapara, that highest act of kindness of the miraculous almighty power of G-d, is the undoing of what was done, the removal of the natural course of cause and effect. It completely undoes all the pernicious mental and physical effects of a negative past on the future life of the transgressor.

Rav Hirsch continues²³ —

The essential meaning of *kapara*, as has already been explained²⁴, is a “covering over” a “burying” of the past. It is the highest act of the absolute, free willed almighty power of G-d. He alone can do away with the natural law of cause and effect, which after all, He Himself has instituted. The consequences of the errors and *aveirot* of the past will have no disturbing effect on the internal and external life of the future. Even after a morally bad past, the blossoming out of a pure and happy future is still possible.

Rav Eisen points out, based on the *Medrash*, that *teshuva* was one of the things which were created before the world. This tells us that it would be impossible for the world to exist without *teshuva*.

The *Nevi'im* speak extensively about the importance and imperative of *teshuva*.²⁵ If, however, *teshuva* is so important, then what is the significance of *kaparah* and *korbanot*?

An aspect of *kaparah* is to cover up the *aveirot*. This helps *teshuva* to be most effective. When the *teshuva* is weak, the *kaparah* can cover up the *aveirot* so the person can move forward with his life, until he is able to do a better *teshuva*. And when the *teshuva* is already strong, the *kaparah* is able to combine with the *teshuva* to both remove every last trace of the *chet*, and to additionally help the person to be even greater than they were beforehand.

In a similar vein, the Maharal²⁶ points out that *kaparah* is able to protect us from danger:

The *machatzit hashekel* (half-shekel) is given as a *teruma* (donation) to Hashem to be a *kaparah* for our souls. Rashi says — This will prevent a plague from occurring, had the census been done by counting. And the *R'eim* wrote — “This was not a *kaparah* for their *aveirot* like all the other *kaparot* in the Torah [but rather a protection].”²⁷

And similarly, the verse²⁸ tells us — “Moshe said to the nation [after the golden calf] — you transgressed a terrible transgression, now I will go up to Hashem; perhaps I will be able to accomplish a *kaparah* for your transgression.” Rashi explains Moshe's words — I shall place a *kofer*, a cleansing and a cover against your *aveirah* to separate between you and the *aveirah*.

²³ *Vayikra* 16:6

²⁴ *Bereshit* 6:14

²⁵ *Yechezkel* 18/33, *Yeshaya* 1/44/55, *Yirmiyahu* 3/33, *Hoshea* end, *Tehilim* 51

²⁶ *Gur Aryeh: Shemot* 30:15

²⁷ Note #131 in the commentary of Rav Hartman to the Maharal

²⁸ *Shemot* 32:30

One last understanding of *kaparah* is that it is related to the concept of *pidyon* (redemption) which is what the term *kofer nafsho* (ransom or fine for the soul) means. The Ramban²⁹ writes —

Kaparah is from the language of *kofer nafsho*, which is a *pidyon* (redemption).

The Ibn Ezra adds³⁰ —

My understanding is that the term *l'chapeir alav* is from the root of *kofer*. And this is explicit — “a person should give a *kofer nafsho*,” and it is written there — “*l'chapeir* for their souls.”

The Malbim³¹ also states this —

The concept of *kaparah* is related to *kofer* (ransom or fine) and *pidyon* (redemption).

And finally, Rav Soloveitchik³² explains —

According to Rashi, the words *kaparah* (acquittal) and “*kofer*” (indemnity payment) are derived from the same Hebrew root (“*kuf pey reish*”) and have a common significance... an indemnity must be offered and paid in order to withdraw the liability claim. That indemnity payment is made through *teshuvah* itself. *Kaparah* (acquittal) is the result of the payment of this “ransom” which releases and redeems man from negative consequences.

²⁹ *Bereshit* 32:21

³⁰ *Shemot* 25:17

³¹ *Vayikra* 5

³² On Repentance – Pinchas H. Peli – Acquittal and Purification

Part 2 — *Arba'ah Chilukei Kaparah* — The Four Categories of *Kaparah*

The *Gemara*³³ tells us that there are four different categories of *kaparah*:

Avar al aseï v'shav (One who violated a **positive mitzvah** and returned), *eino zaz misham ad sh'mochlin lo* (doesn't move from there until he has been forgiven)...

Avar al lo ta'aseh v'asah teshuva (One who violated a **prohibition** and did *teshuva*), *teshuva toleh v'Yom HaKippurim m'chapeir* (*teshuva* suspends [the judgment] and Yom Kippur does the **kaparah**)...

Avar al Krisus u'Misus Beis Din v'asah teshuva (If one violated what is obligated to be **cut off or killed** and did *teshuva*), *teshuva v'Yom HaKippurim tolin v'yissurin m'markim* (*teshuva* and Yom Kippur suspend [the judgment] and *yissurim* **purges**)...

Aval mi sh'yeish Chilul Hashem b'yado — *ein lo koach b'teshuva litlos, v'lo b'Yom Kippurim l'chapeir, v'lo b'yissurin l'mareik, ella kulan (teshuva, Yom HaKippurim, v'yissurim) tolin, umisah m'mareket* — But one who has **Chilul Hashem** in his hand, there is no ability for *teshuva* to suspend, and not for Yom Kippur to be *m'chapeir*, and not for *yissurim* to purge, but rather all of them (*teshuva, Yom Kippur, and yissurim*) suspend [the judgment], and death **purges**.

Mitzvot Asei (Violations of Positive Mitzvot)

Rav Chaim Vital³⁴ explains the significance of a *mitzvot aseï* —

Just like a person has 248 physical limbs, similarly the soul has 248 spiritual limbs, meaning 248 aspects of spirituality. The task of a person is to build these 248 spiritual limbs through fulfilling the 248 *mitzvot aseï* with their physical limbs. The fulfillment of every specific *mitzvot aseï* opens up that particular spiritual limb to be able to accept that mitzvah. One is thus able to build each section of his spiritual structure.

Based on this, the *Sifsei Chaim*³⁵ writes —

Nullifying a *mitzvot aseï*, G-d forbid, deprives this spiritual limb, and causes the transgressor to be spirituality deficient, like one with a disability. In the words of the *Mesilat Yesharim*³⁶ — “True *shleimut* (wholeness and completion) is only through clinging to Hashem... This means striving to connect with Hashem through the actions which bring about this result, which are the *mitzvot*.”

³³ *Yuma* 86a

³⁴ *Sha'arei Kedusha*

³⁵ *Arba'ah Chilukei Kaparah*

³⁶ First chapter

In this world, we cannot discern these serious deficiencies. People who appear to be healthy and complete are destined to be revealed to everyone in the world of truth like amputees, G-d forbid. How great will be the pain and difficulty for a person to be seen as an amputee?

In addition to this, *teshuva* needs to rectify the denigration of the command of Hashem. The violation of a *mitzvat aseï* doesn't only involve the [passive] transgression of “*shev v'al ta'aseh* — sitting and not doing,” but also “*kum v'aseï* — [actively] getting up and doing” the denigration of Hashem, and the rebellion against Him.

The Maharal³⁷ explains —

The concept of *teshuva* is a return to Hashem. When one has violated a *mitzvat aseï*, which means he has not acquired the mitzvah he should have acquired... *teshuva* is *m'chapeir* for this, and he immediately gets *mechilah*... Violating a *mitzvat aseï* is simply sitting idle from the mitzvah and not bringing oneself close to Hashem. *Teshuva* is, therefore, *m'chapeir*, since it is returning to Hashem.

Rav Shimshon Pinkus³⁸ writes —

We understand that for *mitzvot aseï* (positive *mitzvot*) there is definitely *kaparah* with *teshuva* alone.

Why would violations of *mitzvot lo ta'aseï* (prohibitions) require Yom Kippur while violations of *mitzvot aseï* don't require Yom Kippur? While a *mitzvat aseï* is what one is obligated to do for his Creator, the nullification of a *mitzvat aseï* doesn't actually cause damage or destruction... This is because the entire *cheftsa* (reality) of the *aveirah* is simply the debt which he is obligated to make up for his Creator. Once he nullifies this debt [with the *teshuva*], he has necessarily nullified the *aveirah*. Therefore, the *mechilah* itself is *m'chapeir*, since the matter has been completely eliminated...

Teshuva is specifically required, however, to get the *kaparah*, even for a *mitzvat aseï*. The reason is that the violation of a *mitzvat aseï* was caused by a lacking of *yirat Shamayim* (fear of Heaven) in one's soul. Rabeinu Yona writes similarly³⁹ about the severity of a *mitzvat aseï* — one who doesn't fulfill it is lacking *yirat Shamayim*, and is called evil, just like one who violated prohibitions. If one does *teshuva*, it makes sense that one could then achieve *kaparah*, and no trace would be left of the *aveirah* at all. The *teshuva* will have repaired the lack of *yirat Shamayim* in his soul which caused him to be called evil, and the debt of the *mitzvat aseï* will have been addressed by the *mechilah*. Furthermore, the damage and destruction with prohibitions, which also require *kaparah*, is not relevant with a *mitzvat aseï*. The *teshuva* [alone] is, therefore, able to achieve a complete *kaparah*.

If, however, one does not do *teshuva*, but merely acquires *mechilah* through *tefillah*, or a mitzvah with the spiritual ability to be *mocheil* for *aveirot*; while there will be *mechilah*, the damage in the soul caused by the violation of the mitzvah which was done, will remain in existence. Since the transgressor did not do

³⁷ *Gur Aryeh: Devarim 5:12*, note #13 – *Netiv HaTeshuva* – chapter 3

³⁸ *Sichot Rav Shimshon Pinkus – B'inyan Chilukei Kaparah*

³⁹ In the third section of *Sha'arei Teshuva*

teshuva, and is still a *rasha* (evil person), this damage [in his soul] means that he will still lack *kaparah*. Therefore, none of the things which facilitate *mechilah* with *aveirot* are mentioned among the four categories of *kaparah*. They do accomplish *mechilah*, but not *kaparah*. Only teshuva can achieve *kaparah* for the violation of a *mitzvat asei*.

Mitzvat Lo Ta'aseh (Violations of Prohibitions)

The *Sifsei Chaim* then addresses the case of one who violated a ***mitzvat lo ta'aseh*** — Teshuva on prohibitions shield one from *yissurim*, but Yom Kippur is necessary for one to get a *kaparah*. The word *kippur* is a term of cleansing and purification.

He quotes the Maharal who explains why *kaparah* for the violation of a prohibition requires both teshuva and Yom Kippur —

One who did the act of an *aveirah* distanced himself from his previous level. He diminished himself and made himself spiritually impure through the *aveirah*, as opposed to when he had merely violated a *mitzvat asei*... The teshuva alone, which is simply a return to Hashem, is not able to be *m'chapeir* for this deficiency which was created in his soul... The teshuva is, therefore, suspended and Yom Kippur will be [required] for a *kaparah*.”

The *Sifsei Chaim* clarifies —

How is the sanctity of Yom Kippur able to be *m'chapeir* and remove this spiritual impurity [of violating a prohibition]? The proper understanding of this is found in the *Mishnah*⁴⁰— “*Amar Rebbe Akiva — Ashreichem Yisrael, lifnei mi atem m'taharin, umi m'taheir eschem? Avichem sh'b'Shamayim —* Rebbe Akiva said — Yisrael is fortunate, before Whom are you purified, and Who purifies you? Your Father in Heaven... *v'Omer — Mikveh Yisrael Hashem, Mah mikveh m'taheir et hat'mei'im, af HaKadosh Boruch Hu m'taheir et Yisrael —* And he said — G-d is the *mikvah* of Israel — Just as a *mikvah* purifies the impure, even G-d purifies Israel.”

The essence of Yom Kippur is *m'chapeir*, just like the purification of a *mikvah*. Rebbe Akiva emphasizes — “Before Whom are you purified, and Who purifies you?”

Our obligation is to make every effort through the fulfillment of all the essentials of the teshuva... But how will this purification actually happen? “*Avichem sh'b'Shamayim —* Our Father in Heaven” — the closeness to Hashem itself is the purification.

The greatness of Yom Kippur is clear to us — the essence of the day is *m'chapeir*. It has a special ability beyond any other day of the year.

But, the *Ohr Yisrael*⁴¹ explains, all of this depends on the degree to which we do the proper preparation to rectify our ways... In fact, even a small amount of preparation is very beneficial, with nothing in the physical realm to compare to it... In addition, a commitment on Yom Kippur itself, even a small one, will yield a *kaparah*, much more so than that same commitment any other day of the year.

The *Sifsei Chaim* concludes —

⁴⁰ End of *Masechet Yuma* (8:9)

⁴¹ #7

There are two sides with Yom Kippur — first the special *mechilah* from Hashem... and secondly, the mitzvah from our side to return in teshuva...

This gift is so great that Rebbe says the essence of the day itself is *m'chapeir*, even if one did not do teshuva. And even though the *Chachamim* don't agree with this, they agree that the essence of the day is *m'chapeir*, just as long as one does do teshuva. Their intention is that the person must work and prepare himself well for Yom Kippur, in order to be able to receive the intrinsic power of this day. With us as well, this is our entire task — to prepare ourselves well to be able to merit the *kaparah* of the essence of the day.

The Maharal explains —

Since Hashem has no relationship with *chet*, *chet* is also removed from whatever clings to Him. Through clinging to the source of purity, the *chet* is nullified completely. As a result of the *innui nefesh* (affliction of the soul) and removal of physicality from *Yisrael* on Yom Kippur, *Yisrael* will then cling to Hashem, and this is what will remove the *chet* from *Yisrael*.

This is similar to how a *korban* is able to be *m'chapeir* for the violation of a prohibition — Drawing closer to Hashem through bringing an offering is the opposite of the violation of the prohibition which had caused the person to be distanced from Hashem. There is no requirement, however, to require a *korban* for *kaparah* with the nullification of a *mitzvat asei*. This nullification was not an act of distancing, to then necessitate a *korban* to bring one close. It was simply an absence of closeness.⁴²

Rav Shimshon Pinkus⁴³ writes —

Besides the debt one owes for violating a prohibition, there is also the destruction from the *cheftsa* (reality) of the *aveirah*, and the *tumah* (spiritual impurity) which clings to the soul of the transgressor. Teshuva is, therefore, only able to begin the process [of the *kaparah*]. While teshuva has the ability to attain a complete *mechilah*, it is not able to actually repair anything, and, therefore, the damage will still exist. Only Yom Kippur accomplishes *kaparah*, meaning to wipe away every last trace of the *aveirah*, and purify the person from the destruction which the *aveirah* caused.

When it comes to *mechila*, however, it appears that teshuva is not the only way to obtain it. Hashem can give *mechila* for the debt from an *aveirah* for many reasons. One example would be if one davened for *selichah* and *mechilah*. Hashem could then give *selichah* and *mechilah* even without teshuva. Another example is that a *chatan* (man who just got married) has *mechilah* for his *aveirot* without *teshuva*. And, similarly, none of the things listed in the Rabbinical writings as being spiritual facilitators for *mechilah* speak about teshuva.

While a *chatan* can have *mechilah* for every one of his *aveirot*, this will give him no *kaparah* at all. *Mechilah* can be a gift, even without teshuva, but until he does do teshuva, he will still be called a *rasha*. It is very appropriate that the concept of a *chatan* getting *mechilah* for his *aveirot* is learned from Eisav HaRasha (the evil Eisav), who also married an evil woman. Eisav was not transformed into a *tzadik* through the *mechilah* for his *aveirot*. He remained just as evil as before, since he

⁴² *Gur Aryeh: Vayikra* 1:2, note #264

⁴³ *Sichot Rav Shimshon Pinkus – B'inyan Chilukei Kaparah*

never did teshuva and, therefore, attained no *kaparah*. He merely gained a *mechilah* through being a *chatan*. Yom Kippur, however, isn't about *mechilah*, but rather *kaparah*, and to wipe away the *aveirah*. Therefore, if one doesn't do teshuva, and the *aveirah* remains fully existent, one will be unable to have *kaparah* for it.

Rav Aryeh Kaplan⁴⁴ concludes —

As soon as a person does *teshuva* in his heart, he is immediately considered a *tzadik*... All he needs to do is completely abandon his *aveirah*. Similarly, *teshuva* alone helps to protect a person from judgment, both in this world and the next.

Until one's *aveirah* is completely *m'chapeir*, however, it leaves a stain on his soul preventing the complete acceptance of his good deeds, just as dirt on a cloth prevents it from accepting dye. The damage done to his soul must be repaired by *kaparah*, just as a broken vessel needs to be repaired. Furthermore, *kaparah* may be necessary in order that the *aveirah* not constantly reinforce itself until *teshuva* becomes almost impossible.

Yom Kippur is a day when the power of evil is diminished, and G-d's light shines into every soul. Therefore, since the violation of prohibitions blackens the soul, the power of holiness on Yom Kippur is required to cleanse it and restore it to its pristine purity.

Krisus u'Misus Beis Din

If one violated either *krisus* or *misus Beis Din* (a transgression whose penalty is to be cut off, or killed by the Jewish court), *teshuva* and Yom Kippur suspend [the judgment] and *yissurim* purges.

Rabeinu Yona, in *Sha'arei Teshuva*⁴⁵ discusses why serious *aveirot* like *krisus u'misus Beis Din* require not only *teshuva* and Yom Kippur, but also *yissurim*, for a *kaparah* —

Just like it sometimes occurs with illnesses of the body that the sickness is alleviated and most of the affliction is taken care of, but the body is still not rid of it unless one drinks bitter liquids, and additionally that one endures the difficulty of abstaining from all of the foods that one desires, similarly a soul may be sick from many *aveirot*. And although most of the sickness may be healed, and many of the negative consequences have been removed by the *teshuva*... the soul has still not been cleansed from the illness, and the *chet* has not been resolved, until the transgressor has been afflicted with *yissurim*.

The *Sifsei Chaim*⁴⁶ quotes the Maharal⁴⁷ who writes —

This [need for *yissurim*] is because the transgressor is not really fit to be alive, since he cut himself off from the source of life. The concept of *koreis* (being cut off) is its simple meaning — he is cut off and detached.

⁴⁴ Handbook of Jewish Thought – Vol. 2 Atonement (17:2,3,9)

⁴⁵ *Sha'ar Revi'i – Chilukei HaKaparah* (4:1)

⁴⁶ *Arba'ah Chilukei Kaparah*

⁴⁷ *Netiv HaTeshuva*

The *Nefesh HaChaim*⁴⁸ adds —

The concept of *koreis* is that the soul has been separated and cut off from its root. The cord which is tied and attached to Hashem has been detached...

Chazal also say — there is no cutting off other than the severing of life... It is then submerged within the depths of the spiritual impurity and *klipot* (external forces or shells), G-d should protect us.”

The *Sifsei Chaim* continues —

A limb in the body of a person which is cut off, G-d forbid, is due to a cessation of either nutrition or oxygen to that limb, or some damage occurring to the brain which causes it to become detached. Since it has become detached from the source of its existence, it needs to be severed. Similarly, the soul of a person; if it has become detached from the source of its existence, its spiritual existence has been severed. It then attaches to spiritual impurity and gets the judgment of *koreis*.

The Maharal explains —

When *yissurim* come upon the transgressor, this diminishes his physical life, since his life will not be as it should be. Life is meant to be healthy and complete... and one whose *yissurim* rule over him, has no real life. Therefore, the *yissurim* give him a *kaparah*.

The *Sifsei Chaim* then concludes —

Even though his life has not been diminished completely, which would be death, a portion of his soul has been nullified, and he has partially died...

Why would he have a *kaparah* through the *yissurim*? This is *midah k'neged midah* (measure for measure). One who does an *aveirah* detaches himself from the source of life. The rectification is for a portion of his life to be detached through the *yissurim*. Furthermore, when he contemplates the *yissurim*, and understands the *midah k'neged midah* that his soul has been severed from the spiritual life, and he returns in teshuva from love, he will then merit to a new connection to the source of life.

Rav Shimshon Pinkus⁴⁹ also discusses this —

Besides the destruction of the *aveira* itself, the soul [also] died from the damage. While Yom Kippur has the ability to be *m'chapeir* for the *aveirot*, it can't bring souls back to life. Therefore, even after *kaparah*, the impact of the *aveirah* remains with the damage of the soul towards death... This will require *yissurim* to purge the illness of the soul and to heal it.

Rav Aryeh Kaplan⁵⁰ writes —

Aveirot punishable by *kareit* and more severe penalties cause one's soul to be cut off from its spiritual source. This kind of damage cannot be repaired without loosening the grasp of the material on the soul through the weakening of the physical by *yissurim*. *Yissurim* thereby frees the soul from its material bonds, and allows it to become rejoined to its spiritual source.

⁴⁸ 1:18, also quoted by the *Sifsei Chaim*

⁴⁹ *Sichot Rav Shimshon Pinkus – B'inyan Chilukei Kaparah*

⁵⁰ *Handbook of Jewish Thought – Vol. 2 Atonement – 17:15-17,22*

Yissurim only serves to be *m'chapeir* for *chet* when one does *teshuva* and accepts it as such. Furthermore, if one does *teshuva*, it helps to decrease the amount of *yissurim* required for *kaparah*.

There are four *aveirot*, however, which can only be *m'chapeir* through *yissurim*, no matter how completely one does *teshuva*. All of these are derived from verses. They are, swearing falsely, bearing false witness, bloodshed, and adultery.

As essential as *yissurim* are for a *kaparah* with *krisus* and *misus Beis Din*, Rabeinu Yona⁵¹ points out that there are still ways to protect oneself from *yissurim* — *Tzedaka* rescues one from death, as the verse (*Mishle* 10:2) says — “*utzedaka tatzil mimaves* — and *tzedaka* saves one from death.”

Similarly, one should be involved in the mitzvah of *gemilut chassadim* (giving kindness) to help others... visiting the sick, burying the dead, consoling the mourners, and bringing joy to the *chatan* and *kallah* (bride and groom), since these are all aspects of kindness.

And the mitzvah of learning Torah for the sake of Heaven is equal to all of them... There are two understandings of why learning Torah protects one from *yissurim*. First is that *Chazal* tell us — “*Talmud Torah k'neged kulam* — Learning Torah is equal to everything.”

Second is that the exertion in Torah, the toiling in it, and the depriving of one's eyes from sleep, can be considered to be in place of the *yissurim*.

Chilul Hashem

Rabeinu Yona⁵² writes about the severity of *chilul Hashem* —

It is a *chet* which the soul cannot be cleansed or purified from, or made acceptable, until death separates it from the body which had transgressed. This is like a sickness which the body can never recover from.

The Maharal⁵³ elaborates on this point —

When the transgression involves *chilul Hashem*, we don't say the person has merely distanced himself from Hashem, where he is no longer worthy of life. One who transgresses with *chilul Hashem* no longer deserves to be a part of existence. He transgressed with the Name of G-d which rules over the reality; and according to the greatness of His Name, that is the degree to which His reality is known in the world. Therefore, it is not fitting for this transgressor that his existence should be found in the world.

The *Sifsei Chaim*⁵⁴ explains —

Yissurim is not *m'chapeir* for the *aveirah* of *chilul Hashem*, since the essence of the creation has been damaged.

⁵¹ *Sha'arei Teshuva*, end of 4:2, 4:11

⁵² *Sha'arei Teshuva – Sha'ar Revi'i – Chilukei HaKaparah*, beginning of 4:4

⁵³ *Gur Aryeh: Dev.* 5:12 – note #13 – *Netiv HaTeshuva* – chap. 3

⁵⁴ *Arba'ah Chilukei Kaparah*

The *Sifsei Chaim* continues, based on Rav Dessler⁵⁵ —

“Only the destruction of the *rasha* will remove the *chilul Hashem*. As long as even the memory of the *chet* and the *chilul Hashem*, remain in the world, the desecration itself is still existent... Only afterwards [i.e., after the *teshuva*, Yom Kippur, *yissurim*, and death] will Hashem finish the rectification completely, and the returner will be able to cling to Hashem once again.”

The *Sifsei Chaim* clarifies —

While the transgressor may certainly do *teshuva*, there will still be remnants of the *chilul Hashem* as long as he remains alive. Whenever people see him, they will be reminded of his *chilul Hashem*. Therefore, as long as the one who desecrated exists, the desecration will still exist. And *chilul Hashem* is so severe that even a distant cause of a cause of the *chilul Hashem* is also called a *chilul Hashem*...

The *Sifsei Chaim* quotes the *Sha'arei Teshuva*⁵⁶:

Although there is no remedy for this illness (of *chilul Hashem*) like with other *aveirot*, there can still be a cure if Hashem helps the person to sanctify His Torah in front of people, and to make the strength of G-d, and the honor of the glory of His Kingship known to people. His *aveirah* will then be removed through the greatness of his proper actions which were the opposite of the foolish actions he transgressed in.

When one exerts himself to uphold the truth and to support it, is inspired by its words, causes its light to shine before the eyes of His people, strengthens the hands of the men of truth and elevates them, lowers the groups of liars until they reach the dust, these are the ways of *kiddush Hashem*. He brings glory and splendor to His word and His service in the world, and strength and beauty to His Holy Torah. Therefore, in the abundance of his actions to sanctify His Name, and to awaken, help, and support the truth, he will be given *selichah* for the transgression of the desecration, through the *teshuva* which has placed the truth opposite the abomination of the desecration, and the quality of *teshuva* against the quality of his destruction. This is the explanation of the verse⁵⁷ — “*Chet* is *m'chapeir* through kindness and truth.

One may also find *kaparah* through constant involvement and exertion in Torah... since the Torah is a cure for every serious affliction. The verse⁵⁸, therefore, says — “Healing is found in the tongue of the tree of life.

The *Sifsei Chaim* adds —

The Torah gives life... For a person who has removed himself from life, the solution is to return and accept the channel of life. Through clinging to Torah, he will merit to life. Torah is also the general cure which encompasses the entire person.

Rav Aryeh Kaplan⁵⁹ clarifies —

⁵⁵ *Michtav M'Eliyahu* 2:85, based on Rashi (Yuma 86a)

⁵⁶ 4:5, 1:47, 4:16

⁵⁷ *Mishle* 16:6

⁵⁸ *Mishle* 15:4

⁵⁹ Handbook of Jewish Thought – Vol. 2 Atonement (17:23-26)

Some *aveirot* are not *m'chapeir* except by death, as G-d told His prophet, "Surely they will not be forgiven for this *chet* until they die"⁶⁰. This category includes anything that maligns our religion, thereby diminishing G-d's glory and desecrating His Name.

Since all things were created for G-d's glory, and one must be ready to give his life for this, one who desecrates G-d's name is not even worthy of existence, much less so, of G-d's mercy. Therefore, the spiritual damage done by this *chet* cannot be repaired as long as one has any relationship with the material world, and there can be no *kaparah* except with death.

However, like all other *aveirot*, even the desecration of G-d's name can be *m'chapeir* by doing the exact opposite of the *chet*. Therefore, if a person sanctifies G-d's name, bringing many people to serve Him, this *chet* can be *m'chapeir* even during one's lifetime. Similarly, devoting oneself to the study of the Torah, which strengthens G-dliness in the world generally, can bring *kaparah* even for the *chet* of desecrating G-d's name.

If one does *teshuva* and says *viduy*, death is *m'chapeir* for all his *aveirot*.

Therefore, even a very wicked person who did *teshuva* before death is absolved from all *yissurim* beyond death, and is treated like the righteous with regard to mourning and burial. If he does not do *teshuva*, however, his *aveirot* are not *m'chapeir*. Regarding this, it is written, "Their *aveirot* shall remain [engraved] on their bones"⁶¹.

Rav Shimshon Pinkus⁶² writes —

In terms of ***chilul Hashem*** — *mechilah* can be attained through *teshuva*, *kaparah* on the impact of the *aveirah* through Yom Kippur, and even the damage in the heart can be healed through the *yissurim*. However, the *chalal* (the empty space), so to speak, in *k'vod Shamayim* (the honor of Heaven) still remains in the world. Therefore, one cannot yet attain *kaparah* and *nikayon* (a cleansing) on the *aveirah* itself. It is only through death that this *chalal* can be made whole and rectified.

How does death help with this? Rabeinu Yona writes that *kiddush Hashem* helps to be *m'chapeir* for *chilul Hashem*. The logic seems to be that the severity of *chilul Hashem* is in the *chalal* which has been made within the *k'vod Shamayim* (the honor of Heaven). This is what is possible to make whole and rectify through *kiddush Hashem*. If so, then there is no *kiddush Hashem* like death... At the time when Hashem makes a judgment, that is a sanctification. Therefore, death makes whole, rectifies, and fixes the *chilul Hashem*.

Look at the nature of the world. Even those who are not Torah observant, when they are found bereaved, Hashem should protect us, they [often] cover their heads, say *kaddish*, and follow the guidelines of the *halacha*. This is because death is such a profound and awesome *kiddush Hashem*. The nature is that when death is standing in front of us, everyone is nullified to G-d. Therefore, death is *m'chapeir* on *chilul Hashem*, since it itself is what inherently leads to *kiddush Hashem*.

According to this, we can explain that what Rebbe Yishmael calls the four categories of *kaparah* are actually three — *teshuva* along with each of the other three. In other words, there are really only three elements which have the ability

⁶⁰ *Yeshaya* 22:14

⁶¹ *Ezekiel* 32:27

⁶² *Sichot Rav Shimshon Pinkus – B'inyan Chilukei Kaparah*

to be *m'chapeir* — Yom Kippur, *yissurim*, and death. But *teshuva* has no ability to be *m'chapeir* and wipe away any transgression. It is only with *mitzvot aseï*, since there is *mechila*, that [*teshuva*] is *m'chapeir*, and nothing more is necessary. Therefore, there are four categories of *kaparah*, but only three which have the ability to be *m'chapeir*.

Rav Aryeh Kaplan⁶³ concludes —

When a person does *teshuva* out of love of G-d, all of his *aveirot* are counted as virtues, no further *kaparah* is required. However, if he only does *teshuva* out of fear of G-d, his *aveirot* will be counted as negligent transgressions, and will still require some further *kaparah*.

⁶³ Handbook of Jewish Thought – Vol. 2 Atonement (17:1)

Part 3 — The Essence of Yisrael and Transgressions

Kaparah depends on the Essence of Yisrael

An essential element in understanding *kaparah* is the recognition of the lofty and pure essence within every member of Yisrael. As the Maharal⁶⁴ explains —

A person has a soul from the upper realm, and is, therefore, inherently close to Hashem.

The Maharal⁶⁵ discusses the classical source for this concept —

The verse⁶⁶ tells us that the *korban olah*, which is necessary for a *kaparah* “must be offered with the will of the person before Hashem (*yakriv oso lirtzono lifnei Hashem*).” Rashi explains that “*yakriv oso* — it must be offered” teaches [a remarkable point] — “*kofin oso* — we can [actually] force the person” to bring the *korban*. How will this *korban* then be “*yakriv oso lirtzono* — offered with the will of the person”? Rashi answers — “*Kofin oto ad sh'yomar* — ‘*rotzeh ani*’ — We force him until he says — ‘I want’.”

The Maharal quotes the Rambam to explain why this isn't simply coercion —

We only say that someone was forced when he was compelled and pressured to do something which the Torah did not obligate him to do... But someone whose *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) pressed him to nullify a mitzvah or to violate a prohibition, and he was beaten until he did what he was supposed to do, or until he distanced himself from what was forbidden to do, this is not being forced. Rather, he was the one who had been forcing himself [until then] with his negative thoughts.

Therefore, a man who doesn't want to give a divorce, but he does want to be a part of Yisrael, and he wants to do all of the *mitzvot*, and to distance from the prohibitions, it is merely his *yetzer* which had grabbed him. Once he has been beaten, and his *yetzer* has been weakened until he says — “*rotzeh ani* — I want,” he will then be considered to have done the divorce as an expression of his own will.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *Drushat Shabbat HaGadol* – 607

⁶⁵ *Gur Aryeh: Vayikra* 1:2

⁶⁶ *Vayikra* 1:2

⁶⁷ *Hilchos Gerushin* 2:20

In a similar vein, the *Gemara*⁶⁸ tells us —

No person does a *chet* unless a *ruach shtus* (spirit of nonsense) entered into him.”

The Maharal⁶⁹ explains this —

A person clings to Hashem, and therefore, it would be impossible for him to transgress, unless a *ruach shtus* (spirit of nonsense) had entered into him. This *shtus* is what separated him from Hashem, since the clinging to Hashem was through the *seichel* (intelligence).

Rav Soloveitchik⁷⁰ points out —

The Hebrew verb, “*chatati*,” does not [actually] mean — “I have transgressed.” It means — “I stumbled, I missed my goal; *chet* has failed me; *chet* has brought me to despair and led me astray.”

Rav Dessler⁷¹ elaborates on this —

The heart of every transgressor contains the spark of the recognition of truth which was never nullified. It was simply pushed away, and the light of Hashem was darkened through the power of the *tumah* (impurity)... With this deep and mysterious concept, we are fortunate to have the insights of the Maharal who explains many aspects of this in his *drusha* for *Shabbat Shuva*:

Since *Yisrael* has a *nefesh adam* (human soul), ...an *aveirah*... is not in terms of the essence of the *nefesh*...which is holy and pure...but only due to the influence of the *Satan*... The Torah, therefore, says to place the *aveirot* of *Yisrael* on the second goat and to send that goat to the desert... Since the *aveirot* are external...it is possible to also send them [away] from him.⁷²

The *b'nei Yaakov* (Jewish people) have a *nefesh shleimah* (complete soul)... where *chet* can easily be removed. Yom Kippur, therefore, removes *aveirot*.⁷³

“Rebbe Akiva said⁷⁴ — *Yisrael* is fortunate, before whom are you purified... Your Father in Heaven.” In other words, *Yisrael* is purified on Yom Kippur because of the connection *Yisrael* has to Hashem...

Since *chet* is not relevant to Hashem, *chet* is also removed from whatever is connected to Him...

“Just as a *mikvah* purifies the impure, G-d also purifies *Yisrael*”...

And just like *chet* is not relevant to a *mikvah*, and when one is connected to it completely, with no *chatzitzah* (obstacle), one is removed from *chet*, similarly Hashem purifies *Yisrael*... They are connected to Him, with no *chatzitzah*; *Yisrael* is, therefore, pure through Hashem Himself.⁷⁵

Rav Dessler continues —

⁶⁸ *Sotah* 3a

⁶⁹ *Chidushei Agadot* (note #238)

⁷⁰ On Repentance – Pinchas H. Peli – Acquittal and Purification

⁷¹ *Michtav M'Eliyahu* 2:96-101 – *Yom HaKippurim*

⁷² *Daled*

⁷³ *Vav*

⁷⁴ End of *Mishnayot Yuma*

⁷⁵ *Zion*

We have already explained many times that every member of *Yisrael* has an inner essence which is clinging to Hashem. And our Sages have said that *Yisrael* never worshiped *avodah zara* (idolatry) with their inner will, but rather only to permit illicit relations... And for this reason, [even] when a Jew does a *mitzvah lo lishmah* (not for its own sake), he is still called fully righteous... Within the heart of every Jew there is a quality of *lishmah* (complete dedication) which the performance of the mitzvah is connected to... And this is the promise and commitment [which Hashem makes to *Yisrael*] in the verse — “*lo m’astim v’lo ga’altim l’olam* — I will never despise them nor exile them to obliterate them” since this inner sanctity within *Yisrael* can never end. And this is also the meaning of “*Kol Yisrael yeish lahem cheilik l’Olam Haba* — All of *Yisrael* have a portion towards the World to Come.”

Since this concept doesn't depend on the merit or actions of any specific individual, it encompasses and connects all of the souls of *Yisrael* together. On the day of Yom Kippur, the elevated light of this concept is revealed within the souls of *Yisrael*... This means that every single individual, even before he does *teshuva*, is connected to the essence of *Yisrael*, which is a pure reality, unencumbered by any negative forces. As a result of their connection to this holy essence, they are connected to Hashem with nothing blocking them. And this produces a light of righteousness and purity, as the Sages say — “Just as a *mikvah* purifies the impure, so G-d purifies Israel.”

This explains how the essence of Yom Kippur can be *m'chapeir*. It shows and concretizes that the *aveirot* themselves cannot cling to *Yisrael*, whose essence remains pure. If so, where do their *aveirot* come from? It is exclusively external factors which cause them — the influence of the world around them, and the difficulties of the exile. *Yisrael* are, therefore, removed from the *aveirah* and merit to be saved from their negative consequences due to the *rachamim elyonah* (elevated mercy).

Chet is Extraneous and a Deviation

Chet is understood as an extraneous deviation within the context of the lofty and pure essence inside every member of *Yisrael*. This explains the logic of *kaparah*.

The Maharal⁷⁶ writes⁷⁷ —

Without a doubt, *aveirot* are extraneous to a person. They are a deviation within the person, since the person is going away from what is fitting for him to do.

And⁷⁸ —

Since everything extraneous is viewed as *mikrah* (occasional), it is ready to be removed, just like *aveirot* of *Yisrael* are ready to be removed.

Chet is a lack, while Teshuva and Korban is a Return to Hashem

⁷⁶ *Gur Aryeh: Bamidbar* 21:30, note #146 in Rav Hartman translation

⁷⁷ *Drusha of Shabbat Shuva*

⁷⁸ *Netzach Yisrael*, chapter 40

Based on “*Ish b'cheto yumat* — A man dies with his *chet*”⁷⁹, the Maharal⁸⁰ explains — The term *chet* refers to a lack and absence, since the *chet* causes a separation from Hashem. It, therefore, limits his life. The *mizbeiyach* (altar), on the other hand, lengthens one’s life by removing *aveirot*, which shorten a person’s days, and through bringing a person closer to Hashem.⁸¹

Rabeinu Yona writes⁸² about the critical importance of a person's relationship with Hashem —

A ba'al teshuva needs to *daven* that Hashem should cover up his *aveirot*, that Hashem should desire him, that he should be pleasing to Hashem, and that Hashem should answer his requests as if he had never transgressed... It is possible to have *selichah* for an *aveirah*, to have been redeemed through *yissurim*, and from every decree, but Hashem could still not desire him, and not want to receive an offering from him. The greatest aspiration which the *tzadikim* desire is to gain G-d's favor and to be desired by Him... As our great Sages have said⁸³ — We have nothing but the radiance of Your face — i.e., being pleasing to Hashem... We also see this in the prayer of *Dovid HaMelech* at the time of his *teshuva*. After his request — “Cleanse me thoroughly and purify me from my *aveirot*,” he continues and asks to be just as pleasing to Hashem as he was before he had transgressed.

The Maharal⁸⁴ asks —

Why did we need two different *kaparot* to be *m'chapeir* for the golden calf [first from Moshe outside the *Beit Hamikdash* and then from Aharon inside]? As an analogy, imagine that someone transgressed against a human king. Initially, he sends an agent to speak to the king about his *chet*. Although his agent may appease the king for him, there will still be no complete *kaparah* as long as he has not met the king face to face. Only once he himself has come to the king, admitted his *aveirah*, and the king has forgiven him, then his *kaparah* will be complete.

Removal vs. Appeasement Gift

The Maharal⁸⁵ writes that “*kaparah*” is a term of removing and wiping away [in terms of Hashem], while it is an appeasement [in terms of people], as it says⁸⁶ — “*achaprah panav* — I will appease him.”

Rashi explains the verse “*achaprah panav* — I will appease him,” where Yaakov sent gifts to Aisav, as “*avateil rogzo* — I will nullify his anger.”

⁷⁹ *Devarim* 24:16

⁸⁰ *Gur Aryeh: Shemot* 20:23, note #245

⁸¹ *Gur Aryeh: Vayikra* 1:2, note #264

⁸² *Sha'arei Teshuva* 1:15

⁸³ *Medrash Tehilim* 80

⁸⁴ *Gur Aryeh: Shemot* 29:1

⁸⁵ *Gur Aryeh: Bamidbar* 28:15

⁸⁶ *Bereshit* 32:21

And the Radak explains⁸⁷ that the root of *kaparah* [with Hashem] is a term of removing.⁸⁸

The Maharal continues —

It appears to me that whenever the term “*kaparah*” is found with *aveirot*, or with *panim* (face or anger), they are always terms of *kinuach* (wiping off) and *ha'avarah* (removing). There are many examples, like — He wants to wipe his hands⁸⁹. And in the language of *Tanach*⁹⁰ — the sanctified basins in the *Beit HaMikdash* are called — “*k'forei zahav* — the golden vessels,” since the *Kohen* would wipe his hands on them at the rim of the basin.

There is no doubt with this explanation, since [*kaparah*] is not merely used for forgiveness of an *aveirah*, where one transgressed against Hashem. Rather this term [of *kaparah*] is a general one, for all *kinuach* (wiping away) and *siluk* (removal), as well as appeasement [specifically with people].

In addition, the term *chatat* is not primarily referring to one who transgressed against Hashem and violated His words. The term *chet* rather refers to *chisaron* (something lacking), as Yaakov says to Lavan⁹¹ — “I took the loss (*achatena*); you required it from me, whether it was stolen by day or night.”

Rashi explains the term “*chet*” — “*yachati* — as missing [the target]”⁹², and — “I and my son Shlomo shall be lacking (*chatayim*).”⁹³

Targum Onkelos also translates “*achatena*” as that which was missing or lacking. Therefore, when the verse speaks about bringing a *korban chatas*, the meaning is that this *korban* should be brought to rectify the loss from the *aveirah* which was done... The *korban* will remove this lack, like with all *chatas* offerings. They are called a *chatas* because they remove and are *m'chapeir* for the lack...

We need to know that when a person brings a *chatas*, it is not like a person who transgressed to a physical king and then brings a gift to [merely try to] appease him. A *chatas* is called a *korban* (from the root of *karov* — close), since the person distanced himself from Hashem with his *chet*, and the *korban* brings him close to Hashem. It is [specifically through] the closeness to Hashem which comes from the *korban*, that the *korban* removes his *aveirah*. This is because one clinging to Hashem has no possibility to transgress. And as the verse says — “Their *aveirot* were what separated between them and G-d, and turned their faces away from listening.”⁹⁴

The Ramban⁹⁵ says similarly —

“*Achaprah panav*” — He appeased [Aisav] with a gift to nullify his anger. And similarly, “*v'chupar bris'chem*” — “your covenant should be annulled”⁹⁶, and “*lo suchli kaparah*” — “you will not be able to eliminate it”⁹⁷. It appears to me that whenever *kaparah* is used in terms of different *aveirot* and with anger, they are all

⁸⁷ In *Sefer Shoreshim*

⁸⁸ Note #81 in the notes from Rav Hartman on the Maharal

⁸⁹ *Gitten* 56

⁹⁰ *Ezra* 1:10

⁹¹ *Bereshit* 31:39

⁹² *Shofetim* 20:16

⁹³ *Melachim Aleph* 1:21

⁹⁴ *Yeshaya* 59:2, and note #97 in the notes from Rav Hartman on the Maharal

⁹⁵ *Bereshit* 32:21

⁹⁶ *Yeshaya* 28:18

⁹⁷ *Yeshaya* 47:11

terms of *kinuach* and *ha'avarah* — wiping away and elimination... Also, the language of the verse⁹⁸ — “*kipurei zahav* — bowls of gold,” since they would wipe their hands on the rim of the vessels...

The *Likutei Ameirim*⁹⁹ discusses the important implication of this understanding of *kaparah* —

The concept of Yom Kippur is that there is a *kaparah* on this day, meaning a *kinuach* (wiping away), as Rashi explains, and to purify you from all filth. *Aveirot* of *Yisrael* are not an inherent flaw, but only like a stain which fell on a garment... The essential soul of *Yisrael* is like a myrtle branch with a nice scent... One simply needs to wipe it off and it will then remain clean.

Rav Hirsch¹⁰⁰ points out a related idea in terms of Yom Kippur —

Jewish thought is very far from that heathenish point of view, which sees an appeasement of a wrathful G-d by the physical mortification of transgressors, in the *innuy nefesh* (affliction of the soul) of Yom Kippur. It is accordingly not correct to view Yom Kippur as a day of appeasement towards an angry G-d. *Kapara* is, rather, always directed to the [rectification of the] transgressor and the transgression.

Rav Dessler¹⁰¹ mentions a different implication —

I heard in the name of Rav Blazer that a person is able to know if he merited to *selicha* and *mechila* on Yom Kippur or, G-d forbid, that he did not merit. *Chazal*¹⁰² tell us — “*Aveirah m'tam'temet libo shel adam* — A transgression defiles the heart of a person.” Therefore, if the *aveirah* is removed, the spiritual defilement from the *aveirah* is also necessarily removed. Accordingly, if a person sees that his heart is pure, with no corruption, that shows he has achieved *mechilah* for his *aveirot*. But if, G-d forbid, the situation with his heart is like beforehand, remaining in his spiritual impurity, it is clear that he has not achieved *mechilah* for his *aveirot*.

The *Sefas Emmes*¹⁰³, based on his Rebbe, writes similarly that a sign one has received *mechilah* is that he is no longer afraid about *aveirot* he had previously done, but rather his heart has full trust in Hashem. This is because he drew close to Hashem once the *chet* was removed. [But the *Sefas Emmes* asks —] it would seem to be a positive quality to be afraid from the *aveirah*! He answers that one who has a proper fear would actually be unable to imagine doing the *aveirah* at all, even though he had previously violated it... This inability to even conceive of doing the *aveirah* is *teshuva shleimah* (complete *teshuva*), since he has now become a completely different person.

In summary, *kaparah* has one meaning when it is applied to our relationship with Hashem, and a very different one when it is used in terms of our relationship with people.

⁹⁸ *Ezra* 1:10

⁹⁹ #14

¹⁰⁰ *Vayikra* 23:27

¹⁰¹ *Michtav M'Elياهو* 1:266

¹⁰² *Yuma* 39a

¹⁰³ *Devrarm – Shofetim* – #117

When it comes to our relationship with Hashem, there is no concept of appeasing or trying to buy Him off. Rather, we need to do something to directly rectify the *aveirah* we have done. This will then necessarily fix our relationship with Hashem. With our relationship towards people, however, we may sometimes be able to give them a type of "appeasement." And even if this does not address the wrongdoing itself, the person may still be willing to reconcile with us.

The Purpose of Difficulties is Teshuva and Kaparah

The *Derech Hashem*¹⁰⁴ discusses the purpose of *onshim* (not punishments, but negative consequences) for our *aveirot* —

They were only created to exist in the absence of *teshuva*. What Hashem truly desires is man not transgress in the first place, and if he does transgress, that he should do *teshuva*. If one does not do *teshuva*, however, he can still be purified through these *onshim*, and thus not be completely destroyed.

Yissurim, therefore, come to a person to motivate him to do *teshuva*. If that doesn't work, then he must also undergo further *yissurim* to cleanse him of his *aveirot*.

The *Mahara*¹⁰⁵ says similarly —

Kaparah is exclusively a *bitul onesh* (nullification of the penalty), as **Rashi**¹⁰⁶ says — “*Kaparah* nullifies G-d's anger... All *kaparah* with *aveirot*... are a wiping away and a passing over.”

Furthermore, he says¹⁰⁷ —

The *onshim* of the Torah are exclusively for the purpose of *kaparah*. This is in contrast to the *reshayim* among the nations who are simply given what they deserve... [The point is that] the *yissurim* which come upon *Yisrael* are coming for their benefit.

Chet is a Lack, New and Complete is a Kaparah

Rashi¹⁰⁸ writes that Hashem is *mocheil* the *aveirot* of three people —

One who converts,
One who ascends to a position of greatness, and
A man who marries a woman.

The *Mahara*¹⁰⁹ explains this —

The reason for all of these is *briah chadasha* (they became a new entity). They are no longer their initial existence, and, therefore, Hashem gives them *mechilah*... since they became more *shaleim* (complete or whole).

¹⁰⁴ 2:3:5

¹⁰⁵ *Gur Aryeh: Shemot 25:2*, note #32

¹⁰⁶ *Bereshit 32:21*

¹⁰⁷ *Netzach Yisrael* – chap. 14

¹⁰⁸ Based on the *Aggadot Medrash Sefer Shmuel*

¹⁰⁹ *Gur Aryeh: Bereshit 36:3*

Furthermore¹¹⁰ we see that —

All *aveirot* are terms for *chisaron* (lacking)... When a man marries a woman, who completes him, his *aveirot* become constrained, since they are removed from him... *Aveirot* are not so strongly attached to a person. One who is lacking is attached to *aveirot*, which are also lacking. But once a person has become complete, he leaves this lack, and the *aveirah* is removed... We should not object to this [by asking] that every man who is married should have no *aveirot*! That is not true. It is only when he marries a woman that his *aveirot* are removed, since he leaves the *aveirot* through this completion.¹¹¹

Less Physical Leads to Kaparah

Maharal¹¹² discusses the connection between physicality and *chet* —

An *aveirah* is removed when the element which caused the *aveirah* is eliminated, [namely] the physical body which was prone to transgress.

This idea that an *aveirah* emanates from the physical body of a person is a fundamental which is spread all throughout the writings of the Maharal. As he says¹¹³ —

The cause of *chet* is the physical. If he wouldn't have physicality, man would be like an Angel, and he wouldn't have any *aveirot* at all.¹¹⁴

Based on this, it makes sense that¹¹⁵ —

The *yissurim shel ahavah* (afflictions of love) remove and cleanse the soul which is clinging to the body... These *yissurim*, which minimize the body, create a *kaparah*... And with this, one goes out to freedom, since one goes out of the limitation of *chet*.¹¹⁶

This is even true with the *Beit HaMikdash* (Temple in Jerusalem)¹¹⁷ — It was separate in its sanctity from its physical location in the world, until it was holy of holies. And this is what was taught¹¹⁸ — “Why was the *Beit HaMikdash* called “*Levanon*”? Since it cleansed (*malbin*) the *aveirot* of *Yisrael*... [In other words,] since this place was separated in sanctity from the place of the earth, which is extremely physical, therefore the *Beit HaMikdash* cleansed (*malbin*) the *aveirot* of *Yisrael*, which people transgressed by following after their physical desires.

He elaborates on this in his *Drushat Shabbat Shuva*¹¹⁹: —

On Yom Kippur, Hashem commanded for us to minimize the body and to afflict the soul with five afflictions. The soul will then no longer be fully settled with the body, but rather separate and independent, removed from the physical, like an Angel... The five afflictions correspond to the five different aspects of the soul, to

¹¹⁰ *Chidushei Aggadot – Yevamot* 1:139a

¹¹¹ Note #31 in Rav Hartman's commentary on the Maharal

¹¹² *Gur Aryeh: Bamidbar* 20:1

¹¹³ *Pirke Avot* 4:11 – pg. 182 (in Rav Hartman's commentary on the Maharal)

¹¹⁴ Note #6 in Rav Hartman's commentary on the Maharal

¹¹⁵ *Netiv HaYissurim*, chapter one

¹¹⁶ Note #9 in Rav Hartman's commentary on the Maharal

¹¹⁷ *Maharal – Gur Aryeh: Devarim* 3:25

¹¹⁸ *Yuma* 39b

¹¹⁹ *Pey Aleph*

minimize and remove its physicality... until it is sanctified completely from the body. Everything about Yom Kippur is to minimize and remove the body.”¹²⁰

And, similarly¹²¹ —

Among the secrets of the fast of Yom Kippur is the minimizing of the physical body. Because of this, there is *kaparah* and *selicha* which is separate from the *aveirah*. All minimizing is included within *kaparah* for a person, since even the *korban* which is *m'chapeir* involves a minimizing of money.¹²²

A Tzadik can be a Kaparah for his Generation

The *Derech Hashem*¹²³ teaches —

All people were originally bound to each other, as our Sages teach — “*Kol Yisrael areivim zeh l'zeh* — All of Yisrael are responsible for each other.”

As a result of this principle, *yissurim* and pain may be imposed on a *tzadik* as a *kaparah* for his entire generation. This *tzadik* must then accept these *yissurim* with love for the benefit of his generation, just as he accepts the *yissurim* imposed upon him for his own sake. In doing so, he benefits his generation by providing a *kaparah* for it, and at the same time is elevated himself to a very great degree. A *tzadik*, such as this, will be made into one of the leaders in the Community of the World to Come.

All this involves a *tzadik* who is stricken because his generation is about to be destroyed, and would be if not for his *yissurim*. Through this *kaparah* for them with his *yissurim*, this *tzadik* saves them in this world and greatly benefits them in the World to Come.

Within this same category, however, there are *yissurim* that come to a *tzadik* who is even greater and more highly perfected. These *yissurim* come to bring about the chain of events leading to mankind's ultimate perfection.

G-d arranged matters so that select perfect individuals could rectify things for others... The attribute of Justice, therefore, relates to them rather than to the rest of the world.

Individuals such as these, however, are themselves perfect, and are therefore only worthy of good. The only reason they have these difficulties is because of others, and the attribute of Justice must therefore be as satisfied with a small amount of *yissurim* on their part as with a large amount on the part of those who actually transgressed.

Beyond that, the merit and power of these *tzadikim* is also increased because of such *yissurim*, and this gives them even greater ability to rectify the damage of others. They can, therefore, not only rectify their own generation, but can also correct all of the spiritual damage done from the beginning, from the time of the very first transgressors.

It is obvious that individuals such as these will ultimately be the foremost leaders in the Perfected Community, and the ones who are the very closest to G-d.

¹²⁰ Note #17 in Rav Hartman's commentary on the Maharal

¹²¹ Maharal – *Pesicha* to Yom Kippur

¹²² *Nesivot Olam – Netiv HaAnavah – Beit*

¹²³ 2:3:8

Rashi¹²⁴ writes that the verses describing Miriam's death are adjacent to the section describing the *parah adumah* (red heifer) to teach that just like *korbanot* (offerings) are *m'chapeir*, the death of the *tzadikim* are also *m'chapeir*.

The Maharal¹²⁵ explains —

The death of the *tzadikim* is fitting to be a *kaparah*. The removal of an *aveirah* requires that the entity which initially caused the *aveirah* be removed, [namely] the physical body which was prone to transgress. This then eliminates the *aveirah*...

Therefore, all death is *m'chapeir* for a person, since it removes the body which was prone to transgress. The death of a *tzadik* is also a *kaparah* for the entire world.

Since the *tzadik* is fundamental to reality, the removal of his body is considered to be a removal for the entire world. And because of this removal, *chet* is diminished. The death of Miriam was, therefore, juxtaposed to the *para adumah*, since it is really the same point...

Just like the *parah adumah* became its simple foundation, the ashes, [and is *m'chapeir*], also the *tzadik* became its simple foundation, the soul, [and is *m'chapeir*]. It returned to being spiritual, as it was initially, a pure soul. This removes *chet*...since *chet* is related to the physical...

Similarly, the death of *tzadikim* is placed next to the service of Yom Kippur... Just like Yom Kippur is *m'chapeir*, the death of *tzadikim* is also *m'chapeir*. It is all the same concept. Yom Kippur also involves a removal of physical matters, since eating, drinking, and physical pleasures are forbidden; these are the five afflictions. Because of this, it is fitting that there should be a *kaparah* in a place of physical limitation, since physicality is the main place of *chet*, as we explained.

Rav Dessler¹²⁶ discussed this in his *hesped* (eulogy) for the Chazon Ish —

Tzadikim nitpasim b'avon hador — the righteous are taken for the *chet* of the generation¹²⁷. If the generation transgresses, why would the *tzadik* be penalized for their sake?

A person creates a barrier between himself and his Creator with his bad actions, and this blocks the illumination of G-d's kindness from him. The *onesh* (negative consequences) comes to arouse him, to teach him, and to purify him from his *aveirot*. The goal of all *onshim* from *Shamayim* (Heaven) are to rectify this deviation, as the verse says — “Just like a parent chastises his child, G-d your L-rd chastises you.” However, sometimes a good parent or teacher will appear angry for the sake of the child and student to help them. This is the meaning of the verses — “Hashem was furious,” “Hashem is jealous and vengeful.” When the generation has descended to such a lowly state that they no longer understand the *onshim* are coming to wake them up from their slumber, and to recognize and straighten out their evil ways, one of the final possibilities to teach this lesson is to take a *tzadik* from the world. This is to arouse the generation and push them to do *teshuva*.

We must not minimize the seriousness of these matters. The removal of a *tzadik* needs to shake us to our core, and to change our entire path in life. This is not

¹²⁴ *Bamidbar* 20:1

¹²⁵ *Gur Aryeh* – *Bamidbar* 20:1

¹²⁶ *Michtav M'El'yahu* 3:247 – *Tzadikim nitpasim b'avon hador*

¹²⁷ *Shabbat* 33b

some special elevation, but an absolute obligation for us. If we don't use his passing away to become more elevated and inspired, who knows if, G-d forbid, this won't cause [more] trouble...

Rav Dessler continues, quoting the *Medrash*¹²⁸ —

“Losing *tzadikim* is more difficult than the *Churban Beit HaMikdash*.” It was our *aveirot* and actions which caused the *tzadik* to be taken. If so, we will certainly be held liable for this. Shouldn't we be afraid to be considered as if we had, G-d forbid, caused the *tzadik* to die?

“*Tzadik nitpas b'avon hador* — the righteous taken for the transgression of the generation” — so they should do *teshuva* and have a *kaparah* for their *aveirot*. In terms of himself, he could have lived longer. Hashem shortened the days of his service, which were entirely filled with spirituality, for the sake of the Jewish nation. In other words, he was a vehicle for the others...

If, however, G-d forbid, this removal of the *tzadik* doesn't arouse us to a complete *teshuva* and internal change, and our great *korban* was then wasted...we will then, G-d forbid, be held accountable on the removal itself of the *tzadik* for no purpose.

Facilitators for *Kaparah*

*Chazal*¹²⁹ list numerous ways to achieve *kaparah*:

1 *Divrei Torah* — *Chazal* compare the words of Torah to a *mikvah*. Just as a *mikvah* is designed to purify one who is defiled, so too, the words of Torah have the capacity to cleanse even the greatest transgressor. Hashem Himself has gone so far as to declare — “It would be preferable that the Jewish people abandon Me but engage in Torah study; for certainly the light of Torah would then return them to Me.”

2 Murder or Execution by evil government authorities gives even a very wicked person a *kaparah* for all of his *aveirot*, and even without *teshuva* and *viduy*, because of the anguish and terror of such a death. Therefore, even an apostate who meets such a death should be treated like the righteous.¹³⁰

3 Dwelling in *eretz Yisrael* is *m'chapeir*.¹³¹

4 *Yissurim* are *m'chapeir*.¹³²

5 *Mizbeiyach* (altar) was *m'chapeir* when the *Beit HaMikdash* was existant, and now the *Shulchan* (table) of a person is *m'chapeir*.¹³³

6 *Kohanim* eating the meat of the offerings brought as a *kaparah* gave their owners a *kaparah*, but not before that.¹³⁴

7 *Ketores* is *m'chaper* for *lashon hara* — this private *avodah* is *m'chapeir* for a private action.¹³⁵

¹²⁸ *Eichah Rabba* 1:39

¹²⁹ *Aspaklaria – Kaparah*

¹³⁰ *Sifri – Ha'azinu* 333, Rav Aryeh Kaplan – Handbook of Jewish Thought – Vol. 2 – Atonement – 17:27

¹³¹ *Sifri – Ha'azinu* 333, *Medrash Socher Tov – Mishlei* 17

¹³² *Kal v'chomer* from *shein v'regel*, freeing an *eved* (*Brachot* 5ab)

¹³³ *Brachot* 55a, *Chagiga* 27a

¹³⁴ *Pesachim* 59b, *Yevamot* 40a

¹³⁵ *Yuma* 44a

- 8 Death of *Tzadikim* is *m'chapeir*.¹³⁶
- 9 *Machazit hashekel* was collected specifically as a *kaparah* for *Yisrael*. Our way to accomplish this is *tzedaka*.¹³⁷
- 10 *Galut* (exile) is *m'chapeir* for everything.¹³⁸
- 11 Death of the *Kohen Gadol* is *m'chapeir*.¹³⁹
- 12 *Bigdei Kehuna* (clothing of the *Kohanim*), written next to *korbanot* in the Torah, are *m'chapeir*.
- Rav Hirsch gives many insights into this in his commentary on the Torah.¹⁴⁰
- Ketones* (quilted undercoat) are *m'chapeir* for spilling blood and *kilayim* in garments.
- Mich'n'sayim* (pants) are *m'chapeir* for illicit relations.
- Mitznefes* (a type of turban) is *m'chapeir* for arrogance.
- Avneit* (a sash) is *m'chapeir* for *hirhurei leiv* (hidden thoughts) and burglars.
- Choshen* (the breastplate) is *m'chapeir* for perversions of judgments.
- Ephod* (a type of apron or vest) is *m'chapeir* for idolatry.
- Me'il* (a robe) is *m'chapeir* for *lashon hara* and negligent homicide.
- Tzitz* (forehead plate) is *m'chapeir* for *chutzpah* (brazenness).
- 13 Wife gives a *kaparah*.¹⁴¹
- 14 Answering *Kaddish* with excitement and *kavanah*.¹⁴²
- 15 Keeping *Shabbos* with great care.¹⁴³
- 16 Jubilantly praising G-d for his miracles and *Tefillah*.¹⁴⁴
- 17 *Gemilut chasadim* (Giving kindness) is *m'chapeir*, like the *Beit HaMikdash*.¹⁴⁵
- 18 Changing one's station in life gives one a fresh start, and G-d then forgives all of his *aveirot*. Examples: Ordained or Appointed for leadership, *Chatan* and *Kallah* (bride and groom).
- 19 *Korbanot*, Goat sent away on Yom Kippur, Penalties from *Beit Din*, but only with *teshuva*.¹⁴⁶
- 21 Blood — There is no *kaparah* with the offerings without blood.¹⁴⁷

Blocks to Kaparah

Rav Aryeh Kaplan explains –

The first three times a person does an *aveirah*, his *teshuva* is readily accepted...

However, after doing it more than three times, he is considered a habitual transgressor. This greatly reinforces the spiritual damage of the *aveirah*, and makes both *teshuva* and *kaparah* more difficult.

When a person transgresses against G-d, G-d alone can forgive him. But when one also transgresses against a person, then he must make the necessary

¹³⁶ *Moed Katan* 28a, *Medrash Raba* – *Vayikra* 20:7

¹³⁷ *Medrash Tanchuma* – *Ki Tissa* 1, *Baba Metziah* 9a

¹³⁸ *Sanhedrin* 37b, *Medrash HaGadol* – *Bamidbar* 35:28, *Makkot* 11b

¹³⁹ *Makkot* 11b

¹⁴⁰ *Zevachim* 88b, *Medrash Raba* – *Vayikra* 10:6

¹⁴¹ *Medrash Raba* – *Kohelet* 9:7

¹⁴² *Medrash Socher Tov* – *Mishlei* 10

¹⁴³ *Medrash Socher Tov* – *Mishlei* 10

¹⁴⁴ *Medrash Tanchuma* – *Valishlach* 9

¹⁴⁵ *Yalkut Shimoni* – *Hoshea* 6:522

¹⁴⁶ *Zohar* – *Pinchas* 524, *Medrash HaGadol* – *Vayikra* 4:27

¹⁴⁷ *Sifra* – *Vayikra* 4

restitution, and gain forgiveness from the one he has wronged. Neither *teshuva*, nor Yom Kippur, nor death itself, can wipe out an *aveirah* until forgiveness has been earnestly sought from the one against whom it was committed.

When one is asked to forgive, a person should not be stubborn and refuse. We are taught that one who readily forgives will himself be forgiven, and have his prayers answered... It is an act of piety and a true Jewish trait, to forgive immediately, even before being asked. For this reason, it is customary to forgive any hurt or insult before going to sleep each night.

One may refuse to forgive, however, if it is for the other's own good; for example, to cause him to do a better *teshuva*, and never repeat the *aveirah*. Similarly, one may refuse to forgive if he fears that he will incur a personal loss by doing so.

Even in these cases, however, one should [try to] forgive in his heart.

Even though one should always seek forgiveness as soon as possible, it is especially important to do so before Yom Kippur. We will thus begin the holy day cleansed of all *chet*, in a spirit of peace and reconciliation.

If one cannot find the person that he wronged, he should still do *teshuva* before G-d with all his might. In cases like these, G-d will help him to achieve *kaparah* for those *aveirot* which cannot otherwise be rectified. ¹⁴⁸

Kaparah for G-d with the Moon

The *Mahara*¹⁴⁹ addresses a very puzzling *Medrash* —

Many are astounded when they see the words of the Sages¹⁵⁰ —

“Hashem says — Bring a *kaparah* for Me because I minimized the moon.” We cannot, G-d forbid, say that Hashem needs a *kaparah* for His actions, that He did what He should not have done, or that He regrets this... Since Hashem is One, and there is nothing besides Him, these words are not possible...

I will respond to these people with the limitations of their minds, and without going to the depth of the words of the Sages...

When it says — “This goat should be a *kaparah* for Me,” it means that this goat should remove and wipe away the complaints which were made by the moon. It uses the term *chatas* because the complaints are a lack, and it is inappropriate for there to be any complaints here...

G-d forbid, that we should imagine there was anything wrong in G-d's actions when He made the moon smaller. It was actually impossible for it to be any other way, since, as the moon said — “Two kings cannot rule with the same crown”...

Ultimately, no creation can have any complaints against Hashem, since they were all created from G-d's *chessed*...

But even so, Hashem removed the complaints with this goat, according to the words of the moon, since it complained about losing and being diminished...

I have explained the truth of this to you. But don't imagine that this was the complete explanation of the *Medrash*. To explain the entirety of the diminishing of the moon and the removal of its complaints to you, would be impossible without the depth of wondrous wisdom, and this is not its place. It was, however, fitting to address the complaints of those who are bothered by this with the understanding above... Hashem should enlighten our eyes with the light of His Torah.

¹⁴⁸ Handbook of Jewish Thought – Vol. 2 Atonement, Chap. 17: 28, 36, 52, 53, 60, 61)

¹⁴⁹ *Gur Aryeh: Bamidbar* 28:15

¹⁵⁰ *Chulin* 60b

Part 4 — Afflicting Oneself for *Kaparah*

It seems that a group of scholars known as the *Chasidei Ashkenaz* had a *mesorah* (tradition) about transgressors afflicting themselves in order to get a *kaparah*. People would ask them for advice in terms of what they should accept upon themselves to facilitate this. One of the earliest *seforim* discussing this was from the *Rokeach* who gave specific guidance about what should be done for each particular *aveirah*.

The *Sha'arei Teshuva*¹⁵¹ speaks about this practice —

Fasts, afflictions, shedding tears, and depriving oneself from pleasures can be in place of *yissurim*... [In addition,] if the transgressor acknowledges G-d's justice in the *yissurim* which occur to him, and accepts them with love, this will [also] shield him from many more *yissurim* which were fitting to have come upon him.

Rav Oelbaum, in his collection of sources which relate to the Rambam's *Hilchot Teshuva*, points out that the Rambam never explains the degree of *yissurim* we would need to have a *kaparah* for our *aveirot*. There is an argument with this among authorities who came after the Rambam.

¹⁵¹ 4:12

Rav Oelbaum quotes the *Teshuvot Chatam Sofer*¹⁵² who writes —

One who wants to exempt himself from *yissurim* being imposed upon him from *Shamayim*, should afflict himself with afflictions and fasts.

The *Chatam Sofer* brings a proof to this from the *halacha* that one who is *chayav krisut* (obligated to be cut off), but does *teshuva* and gets lashed, will be exempt from the *krisut*. This tells us that one who is *chayav krisut* requires *yissurim* like lashes besides doing *teshuva*. And the *Chatam Sofer* furthermore establishes that every day one fasts [during the daytime, meaning from sunrise to sunset], even in the winter months, counts like a single lash. This idea, that one needs difficult *yissurim* like lashes for a complete *kaparah*, is a very great stringency. After all, the evaluation of the *Beis Din* to determine how many lashes the transgressor should receive, means right up until the point where he would actually die. Therefore, according to the *Chatam Sofer*, a *kaparah* seems to require *yissurim* which are close to death.

The *Chatam Sofer* discusses this in a different *teshuva*¹⁵³ —

To exempt oneself from a *kareis* prohibition, one should fast 39 days for every time one had illicit relations. Even in the winter, a fast day is equal to one lash given by *Beit Din*. This, however, is only when it is combined with the embarrassment of confessing publicly. Without this, the private affliction [of the multiple fast days] will not be similar to lashes in *Beit Din*, which was public. One also needs much *tefillah* (prayer) and supplication to remove the Divine anger, and to not be subject to curses, *Rachmana litzlan* (G-d should save us from this). More than this, I don't know.

The *Teshuvot Nodeh b'Yehuda*¹⁵⁴, on the other hand, says there is no fixed amount of *yissurim* required for a *kaparah*. Rav Oelbaum explains that, according to the *Nodeh b'Yehuda*, the afflictions themselves are not the essence of the *kaparah*. Their main purpose is to bring one to a complete *teshuva*, and to stimulate a sincere regret, as well as a broken heart. In fact, he writes explicitly — “one who is able to slaughter his desires, should do it through [learning] Torah...which weakens one's strength. I am, therefore, very lenient with fasts and afflictions.”

And while the Rambam himself does not mention fasting for the sake of a *kaparah*, he does write about *galut* (exile) — “One may exile himself from his place, because exile is *m'chapeir* for transgressions, since it causes one to be humble.”¹⁵⁵

The *Maharam m'Lublin*¹⁵⁶ presents a very demanding process for the transgressor to receive a *kaparah* —

Initially, this person should fast 40 consecutive days [i.e., during the daytime], and afterwards, fast three days out of every week. He should not eat meat or drink even beer, [during the night following] every one of these fast days. He should not sleep on mattresses or sheets for an entire year, except for Shabbat and holidays. He should not bathe his body or wash his hair, except once every month... He should lay down in the doorway of the *Beit Medrash* at the time when

¹⁵² #125

¹⁵³ *Orach Chaim* – 1:175

¹⁵⁴ #141, *Orach Chaim*, *siman* 35

¹⁵⁵ *Hilchot Teshuva* 2:4

¹⁵⁶ #44

people are leaving the *Beit Medrash*, and allow the people to walk on top of him... He should go once every month with 10 people and prostrate himself on the grave of the Gaon, with tears, crying out, and asking for *mechila*. He should do this for 12 months. He should not go to any festive meal or celebration, trip or enjoyment, for this entire first year. And he should continue to fast every Monday, Thursday, and Monday until a total of 3 years are finished. He should drink no beer, and certainly no honey, or whiskey for intoxication, for 5 years, neither with friends nor in his own home.

And the *Marshal Hasheni*¹⁵⁷ outlines an even more extreme regimen for a particular woman to receive *kaparah* —

The beginning of the week, on the 23rd of Iyar, she should begin to fast every day for 365 consecutive days, besides days when the *tachanun* prayer is not said. And she should eat no meat and drink no wine except for Shabbat and holidays until the 21st of Iyar of the following year, plus however many days she will need to fast to make up the total of the 365 days... During this year she should wear black, wrap herself in a veil made from coarse fabric, with a belt of Egyptian rope, and change her robe only once a month. She should wash her hair only once a month for *k'vod Shabbos*, and only bathe in hot water *erev Yom Tov*. And even so, this should be minimal, not too enjoyable, but just what is necessary for *k'vod Yom Tov*. She should sleep only on straw which is on the ground, or on a couch, except for Shabbat and holidays... She should get 39 lashes, as is customarily given in our times, but not more. She should sleep by herself, in the place of the mourners, but away from the other female mourners...

She should sit [among women] for a short period of time during the summer, in a place where she will be exposed to ants or flies, every Monday and Thursday. She should then say the *viduy* in front of these women while covering her upper body. And, in the winter, she should sit this period of time in cold water in a cold bathtub every Monday and Thursday. All of this should be done according to the judgment of the Rav, and the Sages of the city, whether strict or lenient. This includes other things as well as the fasting, depending on how much she can endure. During this period of the fasting, she should go to no festive meals, even for a mitzvah, and even on the days she is allowed to eat, like Shabbat and holidays. She should be careful to not hear any singing or music, and avoid social gatherings and excursions. She should not speak with men or boys, unless there is a pressing need. After the 365 days of fasting have ended, she should fast for an additional year, at least every Monday and Thursday. If she can handle two additional years of fasting every Monday and Thursday, that would be even better. She should also fast her entire life on the terrible day she actually stumbled, so that her transgression will always be in front of her, and she should say *viduy* privately. If, however, she marries a different man, she will be exempt from fasting so she should not be displeasing in his eyes. The rest of her life, she should be extra vigilant to avoid involvement and unnecessary speaking with men... *Perhaps* there is hope, since Hashem is merciful, that with this she will have a *kaparah* for her transgression.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ A *Talmid* of the Marshal, and the *Rebbe* of the Shelah and the Bach

¹⁵⁸ An Abbreviated Order of *Teshuva* for a Woman

As was discussed previously, the *Nodeh b'Yehuda*¹⁵⁹ had a much different understanding of this entire issue —

I was requested to provide guidance for a *Ba'al Teshuva* in terms of his transgression...

It is a problem to ask this difficult question from me, since I am not accustomed to responding to questions where I am unable to find a source in the words of the *Gemara* and the *Poskim*. I never found [this idea of] multiple fasts on specific days according to how serious the *aveirah* was. It is true that fasts are written in the verses of the Prophets for the purpose of *teshuva*. But the extent of the number of fasts is not spelled out in either the verses or the *Gemara*; only in the *sifrei mussar* (books dealing with self-improvement). The *teshuva* discussed there, and most of the ideas, are built on speculation with no sources, one book relying on another book, with no foundation at all. We find much which is stringent and lenient with this, and therefore it is difficult for me to respond...

And the guidelines we find, where the *ba'al teshuva* must do something three times, corresponding to each transgression, is lacking any foundation...

The truth is that the fasting is really secondary to the *teshuva*. The essential *teshuva* is to abandon the *aveirah*, say the *viduy* with a broken heart and a sincere regret, which is inspired to draw close to and love the Creator. That is a *teshuva* which is returning to Hashem and His mercy, and clinging to Him. But other things like fasting and affliction, are not the main point. We need to know, without any doubt, that *teshuva* [itself] is *m'chapeir* a complete *kaparah*. This is well known in the Torah, *Nevi'im*, and *Ketuvim*, in both Talmuds, and in all of the *Medrashim*...

One who violated *krisus* or *misus Beit Din* (prohibitions obligated in being cut off or death by a Jewish court) does, however, require *yissurim* to be cleansed, and therefore, the *yissurim* are essential to the *kaparah*! But, while it is true that one does need *yissurim* [in that case], the Chazal have told us — “The minimum of *yissurim* [may be the small annoyance of] putting one's hand into one's pocket to take out three coins, but only removing two.”...

Ultimately, regret, a broken heart, and crying are all very effective, and much crying in private is praiseworthy...

Although I am very lenient with fasting and afflictions, and *teshuvat hamishkal* (*teshuva* which corresponds to the *aveirah*), however to [completely] exempt the transgressor with nothing is impossible...

Rav Dessler¹⁶⁰ points out that if one violated either *krisus* or *misos Beis Din*, we know that —

Kaparah is impossible without *yissurim*. But one need not wait until he is afflicted from Heaven. One can accept *sh'virat haYetzer* (breaking the *Yetzer Hara*) upon himself, since *sh'virat haYetzer* is the greatest *yissurim* of all.”

Rav Aryeh Kaplan¹⁶¹ explains —

It is customary by some to receive the 39 lashes administered by the courts on the eve of Yom Kippur as a sign of *teshuva* and *kaparah*.

A person can avert suffering by the hand of G-d by imposing it upon himself in the form of fasting and other self-mortification... In a sense, fasting can take the

¹⁵⁹ *Orach Chaim* – #35 – First printing

¹⁶⁰ *Michtav M'Ellyahu* (5:170 – *HaYissurim HaGedolim* – *Shvirat HaYetzer*

¹⁶¹ *Handbook of Jewish Thought* – Vol. 2 Atonement – 17:11,19,20

place of sacrifice, where one's own flesh is offered in place of the animal's, thereby strengthening the spiritual in man. Fasting alone, without *teshuva*, however, has no purpose.

One can similarly undertake other forms of self-mortification such as self-exile. In order to *m'chapeir* for an *aveirah* completely, one must undertake *yissurim* equal to the enjoyment gained by the *aveirah*, and also equal to the penalty prescribed for it.

Rabbi Touger¹⁶² writes —

Since the *Gemara*¹⁶³ speaks about *yissurim coming upon* the transgressor, the *Iggeret HaTeshuva* of the Rambam¹⁶⁴ derives from this that there is no need to combine one's *teshuva* with fasts or other penances. *Yissurim* should be left “to come upon him” — i.e., by Divine decree. This is also implied by the verse in *Tehilim*, where G-d says — “I will be the One to punish...” Nevertheless, many texts of *mussar* do suggest fasts and penances to avoid *yissurim* from Heaven, and to expedite the conclusion of the *kaparah*... In the present day, however, most authorities suggest that we devote our energies to positive activities without inflicting *yissurim* upon ourselves.

Part 5 – Kaparah Cannot Make up for Lost Opportunities

The *Sifsei Chaim*¹⁶⁵ 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. *Chazal*¹⁶⁶ explain the words of the verse¹⁶⁷ — “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 *Chazal*¹⁶⁸ 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

¹⁶² In his notes to his translation of *Hilchot Teshuva*, pg. 17

¹⁶³ *Yuma* 86a

¹⁶⁴ Chapter 1

¹⁶⁵ *Arba'ah Chilukei Kaparah – Teshuva al mitzvat asei*

¹⁶⁶ *Brachot* 26a

¹⁶⁷ *Kohelet* 1:15

¹⁶⁸ *Yuma* 86a

teshuva from love. That will, therefore, become a merit for him, since the damage from the denigration became his rectification.

Rav Avigdor Miller¹⁶⁹ 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*¹⁷⁰ 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 says¹⁷¹ — “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, 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”¹⁷². It is impossible to replace the loss of a mitzvah, and therefore, there is no peril like that peril.

Rav Miller explains further¹⁷³ —

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*

¹⁶⁹ In his commentary on *Mesillat Yesharim* – Chapter 7 – *Zerizus* (Alacrity)

¹⁷⁰ 4:2

¹⁷¹ *Eduyos* 2:10, *Shabbat* 33b

¹⁷² *Kohelet* 1:15

¹⁷³ *Kingdom of Kohanim*, pg. 52, 4:2

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*¹⁷⁴ 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*¹⁷⁵ says, quoting the verse in *Kohelet*¹⁷⁶, referring to a lost mitzvah — “That which is lacking can never be replaced.”

Rav Aryeh Kaplan¹⁷⁷ 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. 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*¹⁷⁸ 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 verse¹⁷⁹. 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*¹⁸⁰ tell us that even the dead require *kaparah*!

Emunah in Teshuva and Yom Kippur

¹⁷⁴ *Yoma* 86a

¹⁷⁵ *Chagigah* 9a

¹⁷⁶ 1:15

¹⁷⁷ The Handbook of Jewish Thought – Vol. 2 – 13:37, 15:63

¹⁷⁸ *Gemara Nazir* 23a

¹⁷⁹ *Bamidbar* 30:9,13

¹⁸⁰ *Sifri – Shofetim* 209

The Rambam¹⁸¹ 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 Pinkus¹⁸² 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*¹⁸³ quotes a *Medrash*¹⁸⁴, 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 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.

¹⁸¹ *Hilchos Sh'gagot* – 3:10

¹⁸² *Sichot Rav Shimshon Pinkus* – *Tov v'Yashar Hashem*

¹⁸³ 624:5

¹⁸⁴ *Bamidbar Rabba* 17:2