**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**A River Flows from Eden:**

**The Garden of Eden**

**as the Inner Source of the Jewish Holidays**

**Rav Uriel Eitam**

**Shiur #05:**

**The Atonement that Purifies:**

**The Unique Service of Yom Kippur**

**Part II**

**III**

**Atonement, Purification and Adam**

**Introduction**

In the [previous *shiur*](https://www.etzion.org.il/en/shiur-04-atonement-purifies-%E2%80%93-part-i-unique-service-yom-kippur)*,* we saw that two systems intermingle on Yom Kippur: atonement and purification. We then noted that these two systems already meet in *Parashot Tazria-Metzora* in the sections dealing with a *zav,* a *zava*, a *yoledet* and a *metzora*: it does not suffice to purify oneself from the associated impurity, but rather one must also undergo a process of atonement. In light of this, we raised the possibility that the need for atonement reflects the fact that impurity involves an element of sin. Against this background we must examine in greater depth the other side of the coin: what are the roots of the connection between sin and impurity?

**Adam: The Connection Between Impurity and Sin**

The impurity that is founded on the encounter with death is discussed in the Book of *Vayikra* as a phenomenon that is an inseparable part of the natural order of the world, with the Torah teaching us its halakhic implications. However, in order to understand the phenomenon of impurity more deeply, we must consider the reasons for its very existence.

The roots of the phenomenon of impurity trace back to the story of Adam. According to the plain meaning of the verses, Adam's sin brings death into the world, thus creating a break in natural reality. The death imposed upon man because of his sin is the root of impurity in the world, death being the primary source of impurity. It turns out then that impurity is fundamentally a consequence of sin. Sin severs the sinner from the source of life and causes him death; hence the inner logic behind the concept that sin defiles.

This assertion is also found in the words of *Chazal*, who describe even the impurity itself — and not only death — as punishment for man's sin:

Of all the impurity in the world, the Torah is most stringent about the impurity of man in his death. Owing to his transgression, death is decreed upon him, as it is stated: "Because you have hearkened to the voice of your wife" (*Bereishit* 3:17). (*Midrash Tadshei* 15, cited by *Torah Sheleima*, *Bereishit* 3, 115)

That is to say, the impurity that is contracted through contact with a corpse is the most severe form of impurity, because death is imposed upon Adam in the aftermath of his sin.

If so, even though death and impurity are part of the natural order, they are essentially a result of sin that lowers the world from its original level which is supposed to be without death and impurity, bringing it to a new and deficient state.

There is also a specific connection between each of the impurities that require atonement and the sin of Adam.[[1]](#footnote-1) The most striking connection is found in the case of a *yoledet*. The pain of labor is one of the clearest consequences of that sin — "In pain you shall bring forth children" (*Bereishit* 3:17) — and that is what brings a woman to swear that she will never again have relations with her husband.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The two other impurities that we discussed, *ziva* (the state of impurity shared by *zav* and *zava*) and *tzara’at*, are also connected by *Chazal* to Adam's sin. According to them, *ziva* is one of the ten curses pronounced upon Adam for his sin (*Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 14), and *tzara’at* comes into the world at the time of Adam's sin in the wake of the derogatory speech spoken by the serpent about the Creator:

"This shall be the law of the *metzora*" (*Vayikra* 14:2) — he who slanders (*ha-motzi shem ra*), who found evil (*she-matza ra*). And so you find with the primeval serpent who spoke slanderously about its Creator and therefore was afflicted with *tzara’at*… With what did He curse him (*arero*)? With *tzara’at*, as it is stated: "For it is a malignant (*mameret*) *tzara’at*" (*Vayikra* 13:52). Rav Huna said in the name of Rabbi Yehuda ben Levi: The scales on the serpent's back are its *tzara’at*.[[3]](#footnote-3) (*Midrash Tanchuma,* *Metzora* 2)

**Atonement: For Adam’s Sin**

The two possibilities that arise as to whether the atonement required in the various cases of impurity is necessary because of sin are seemingly contradictory, but upon closer examination they intersect. The atonement offering that is brought for the various impurities is essentially atonement for Adam's sin. It is offered because of sin, but not necessarily because of the sin of the person who has become ritually impure. Impurity which leads to distance from God (and which may be likened to Adam's expulsion from the Garden of Eden) comes into the world because of Adam's sin, and therefore it requires atonement for the sin that caused it. Rabbeinu Bachya notes this point in his explanation of the impurity of a *yoledet*:

"And he shall make atonement for her" (*Vayikra* 12:7). The term "atone" applies exclusively to sin. Therefore this offering of a *yoledet* is novel like the offering of a *metzora*, for how did she sin during childbirth that the Torah should obligate her with an offering… It is possible to explain that this offering is not for her own sin, but for her [primeval] mother [i.e., Chava], who is “the mother of all living.” (*Rabbeinu Bachya*, *Vayikra* 12:7)

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the atonement offering of a *yoledet* is aimed at Chava's sin. What is the connection between Chava's sin and childbirth? The answer is simple: because of Chava's sin, a curse is pronounced upon all women: "In pain you shall bring forth children" (*Bereishit* 3:16). Whenever a woman gives birth, she encounters the deficiencies of the world that stem from Chava's sin. Our current state, in which childbirth entails immense pain and mortal danger, is not the perfect and desired situation. Rather than involving a deep experience of life, childbirth is bound to the brink of death, this because of the curse in the aftermath of Chava's sin. The original sentence of "For in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die" (*Bereishit*  2:1), which hovers over the woman who eats from the tree and gives of its fruit to Adam, is reduced to "In pain you shall bring forth children," which involves only an encounter with the threat of death. This situation occasionally brings a woman to swear an oath, and this is the source of the impurity of a *yoledet* which requires atonement after purification.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Rabbeinu Bachya makes a similar comment about a *zava*:

Know that this sickness that is planted in women is not found among the females of other species, but only in the human species, i.e., the woman. This is by way of punishment as part of the decree pronounced upon Chava, as it was said to her: "I will greatly multiply your pain and your travail" (*Bereishit* 3:16). Therefore it is not found among other species, for animals have no intellect, and their fate is not determined by reward and punishment (*Rabbeinu Bachya, Vayikra* 15:19)

In summary, Adam's sin creates impurity (death) and leads to distance from God (expulsion from the Garden of Eden). Together with the impurity of death come the impurities of childbirth, *ziva* and *tzara’at*. In order to achieve purification from these impurities, the Torah requires two steps that parallel these two consequences: for the impurity, there are the seven days of purification, and for the distance from God there is the eighth day of atonement.

The laws of ritual impurity, necessitated by Adam's sin, are binding specifically upon the people of Israel. Even though it is not we who have brought impurity into the world specifically, we are the ones who must deal with its reality and offer an atonement sacrifice for it. Receiving the Torah means accepting responsibility to repair Adam's sin as part of our mission to bring the world closer to its purpose. While we are not guilty of this sin, we must accept its consequences in order to repair it.

**IV**

**Yom Kippur**

We can now return to the Torah's assertion. "For on this day shall atonement be made for you, to purify you; from all your sins shall you be purified before the Lord" (*Vayikra* 16:30). Now we may understand why we can relate to our sins as impurities and become purified from them, as well as the idea of neutralizing the dimension of responsibility for sin and applying atonement to witting and to unwitting sins in equal measure.

**Broadening Responsibility**

Using the concepts of impurity with regard to sin leads to a far-reaching conclusion. On Yom Kippur, God relates to sin not as an action that begins with free choice, but rather as something that stems from a defect in reality, and therefore one can purify oneself from a sin, even if it was committed deliberately.

To understand the mystery of the atonement of Yom Kippur, let us compare it to what we have seen thus far. The relationship between sin and impurity on Yom Kippur is the opposite of the relationship between sin and the impurities of childbirth, *ziva* and *tzara’at*. In the case of the impurities of childbirth, *ziva* and *tzara’at*, the Torah casts upon the individual the responsibility to atone for a sin that he or she has not committed. On the other hand, on Yom Kippur, the Torah addresses the sins that the individual (or community) has committed as impurities rooted in the deficiencies of the world, not in free choice, and therefore it allows purification even from deliberate sins — "to purify you from all your sins" (*Vayikra* 16:30).

The broadening of responsibility to encompass a flaw in reality (and requiring atonement even for the impurities mentioned above) and the removal of responsibility by seeing the flaws of reality as responsible for sin (and allowing purification even from deliberate sins) are two side of the same coin.

We have seen that the root of the connection between sin and impurity lies in the sin of Adam, as Adam's sin brings death upon him and thus brings the phenomenon of impurity into the world. Throughout the year, the Torah broadens the responsibility for the sin of Adam, casting upon us the obligation to atone for that sin, when it requires an atonement offering for the impurities of childbirth, *ziva* and *tzara’at*. On Yom Kippur, the Torah expands the responsibility of Adam's sins to include all the nation’s sins, and therefore it does not see the individual as responsible for his or her own sin, but only as impure on account of the encounter with the reality created by the sin in the Garden of Eden (thus purification is possible even for deliberate sin).

**The Mystery of the Atonement of Yom Kippur**

How is Adam responsible for the sins of the nation? When Adam eats from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, good and evil intermingle within him and the foulness of the serpent enters him. From that time on, he has an inner attraction to evil as to good. The soul within him, which is meant to lead his body, finds itself now in an infinitely difficult arena where the voice of the serpent makes itself heard from within him. This voice expresses the evil inclination towards pride and away from God.

From the time of Adam's sin, humanity finds itself subject to rules it never sought and which do not accord with the soul within it. Humans are not responsible for these conditions, which are not of their choosing and that they wish would not exist.

From a certain perspective, it may be argued that these ground rules are responsible for sin, for in its new condition, the human race cannot remain completely clean of sin: "There is not a righteous man upon earth, that does good, and sins not" (*Kohelet* 7:20).

Every sin is committed out of free choice, but it also contains something of the flaw in reality that enters the world with Adam's sin. The flaws which come into the world because of Adam's sin are a fact, and we are placed in this reality without having chosen this fate. Throughout the year we relate to the free-choice element in man, even if it has shrunk because of Adam's sin, and we cast upon each person responsibility for his or her actions. The Torah even demands a measure of responsibility for impurities that go beyond free choice; even for them, one is required to make atonement. Yom Kippur, however, deals with the opposite angle — with the decline in reality itself in the wake of Adam's sin, and with the price that we pay for that, though we are not to blame.

Therefore, the atonement of Yom Kippur touches a deeper point than the atonement of the rest of the year. Over the course of the year, atonement deals with a specific sin that a person has committed, but on Yom Kippur what is at stake is the very nature of the world in which we live. The possibility of living in a manner that runs contrary to the will of God, which is perceived as a real option, exposes a deficiency inherent in the world. We have a choice whether or not to sin, but we do not have the choice whether or not to live in a world where "sin crouches at the door" (*Bereishit* 4:9), and the evil inclination impersonates a person's inner will and tries to steer one away from the path of God. This reveals a flaw and deficiency in the world itself, created by Adam. The atonement of Yom Kippur relates to this deficiency and comes to purify us from it.

**The Duty of Repentance on Yom Kippur**

Against this notion that underlies our entire argument — that Yom Kippur relates to sins as stemming from the shortcomings of reality and does not burden us with full responsibility for them — stand the words of the Mishna which requires that Yom Kippur be accompanied by repentance. "Death and Yom Kippur achieve atonement with repentance" (*Yoma* 8:8). Repentance involves recognizing one's sins, regretting having committed them, and especially accepting upon oneself not to do them again in the future. This seems to see us as responsible for our sins and therefore responsible for their repair as well.

Proof can be adduced, however, that the weight of repentance on Yom Kippur is different from its weight over the course of the year.

First of all, in the Torah section dealing with Yom Kippur, there is no explicit requirement of repentance.

Second, alongside the view of the Sages that the atonement of Yom Kippur depends on repentance, we find also the view of Rabbi Yehuda Ha-nasi that Yom Kippur achieves atonement even without repentance (*Yoma* 85b).

Third, even though the Rambam rules in accordance with the view of the Sages that the atonement of Yom Kippur depends on repentance, he greatly restricts the scope of this assertion against the background of the atonement of the goat that is sent away to Azazel. In his opinion, the goat that is sent away atones for most sins even without repentance, and only the more severe sins (false or vain oaths and prohibitions subject to capital punishment, by human or Divine courts) are conditional upon repentance (*Hilkhot Teshuva* 1:2).

Apart from reducing the weight of atonement on Yom Kippur, even in the places where repentance is a condition for the atonement of Yom Kippur, we can see that the nature of that repentance is different. The confessions uttered by the High Priest on Yom Kippur (both for his own and his fellow priests' sins, and for the sins of the people of Israel) do not include expressing regret or accepting anything for the future (see Rambam, *Hilkhot Avodat Yom Ha-kippurim* 2:6 and 4:2).[[5]](#footnote-5)So too, the confession recited by each individual in the Yom Kippur prayer does not include acceptance for the future. Instead of accepting responsibility and declaring that we accept upon ourselves not to sin again in the future, we turn to God and ask that He make sure that we not sin again: "May it be Your will that I not sin anymore" (Yom Kippur liturgy).[[6]](#footnote-6)

According to this form of confession, we acknowledge the fact that we have committed sins, but we do not accept responsibility for correcting the situation. This is well-understood based on what we said above: Yom Kippur relates to sin as stemming from the defects of reality. Impurity and the intermingling of good and evil are now part of our world order, whether we want it or not. In our confession, we express our desire to detach ourselves from sin; we submit our request to God, Who is in charge of reality, that He help us not to sin anymore.

We learn from this that the repentance of Yom Kippur is different from and more restricted than repentance throughout the year. It focuses on recognition of sin, not acceptance for the future. It is impossible to base Yom Kippur on acceptance for the future because the evil inclination and impurity have been present in reality since the time of Adam, and we cannot accept absolute responsibility for this component. Furthermore, the *mitzva* of the Yom Kippur service is cast upon us every year, and we know already now that, come next Yom Kippur, we will have to atone for our sins.

In the coming *shiurim*, we will see that turning sin into impurity and atonement into purification that applies to both witting and unwitting offenses and reduces the weight of repentance does not cancel our part in the Yom Kippur service, but only changes its nature.

**Happy Are You, Israel**

If we adopt a comprehensive view, we may see that the contradictory perspectives, the one that imposes upon us the responsibility to atone for the sin of Adam, and the other that removes from us the responsibility of repairing our own sins, complement each other. Throughout the year, the people of Israel are obligated to atone for the sin of Adam. The Jewish people are required to do so not because we are responsible for them more so than any other nation, but on the contrary, because we are God's partners in repairing the world and dealing with sin. The people of Israel, who accept responsibility for repairing and atoning for the sin of Adam and Chava, are precisely those whose souls are further from sin than all other peoples. Precisely because, throughout the year, we are responsible for the "sins" of impurity that enter the world on account of Adam's sin, on Yom Kippur the Torah removes from us responsibility for our own sins. The people of Israel merit that once a year God considers the roots of sin and clears us of it.

The great innovation of Yom Kippur, which allows us to be purified from sin as if it were the result of defects in the world and not of human action, is the issue with which tractate *Yoma* closes:

Rabbi Akiva said: Happy are you, Israel! Before Whom do you purify yourselves? And Who purifies you? Your Father who is in Heaven, as it is stated: "And I will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you shall be pure" (*Yechezkel* 16:25); and it further says: "You hope (*mikvei*) of Israel, the Lord" (*Yirmeyahu* 17:13). Just as a ritual bath (*mikveh*) purifies the impure, so too the Holy One, blessed be He, purifies Israel. (*Yoma* 8:9)

Rabbi Akiva's remarks sum up the primary innovation of Yom Kippur. The uniqueness of the atonement of Yom Kippur lies not only in its broad scope. This scope is indicative of a transformation of the entire spiritual system. The foundation of the atonement of Yom Kippur is bringing us over to the track of purification.

Purification involves returning to the starting point, in which our world returns, as it were, to its original state before it became flawed. Conceiving sin as impurity and atonement as purification teaches us that the people of Israel are fundamentally pure and that on Yom Kippur we return to that purity.

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In this *shiur*, we have discussed the basic level of the connection between the atonement of Yom Kippur, the sin of Adam and Chava, and Israel's mission to repair it. The depth of that connection will be elucidated in the coming *shiurim*.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. This element appears explicitly in the words of the *Shela*:

It also followed from Adam's sin that the garments of light were removed from him and he was clothed in garments of skin and flesh, and he became subject to the plague of *tzara’at*, as it is stated: “When the plague of *tzara’at* is in a man (*be-adam*)” (*Vayikra* 13:9), and it is written: “When a man (*adam*) shall have in the skin of his flesh” (*Vayikra* 13:2). That is to say, Adam, who brought about garments of skin and flesh, caused *tzara’at* that befalls one who speaks evil. The serpent spoke evil about God, blessed be He, saying: Eat from the Tree of Knowledge, and he seduced Chava and Adam… And similarly the matter of a *zav* and a *zava*, it all follows from the foulness of the serpent" (*Shenei Luchot ha-Berit*, *Vayikra, Torah Or* 7). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Midrash brings the comment of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai regarding the oath taken by a woman in labor in connection with the punishment imposed upon Chava: "'[In pain you shall bring forth children,] and your desire shall be to your husband' (*Bereishit* 3:16) — when a woman is seated on the birthing chair, she says: From now on I will not have relations with my husband" (*Bereishit Rabba* 20, 7). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Another connection between the serpent and the *tzara’at* is found in the fact that the first time that *tzara’at* is mentioned in the Torah, it appears together with a serpent, in the two signs that Moshe receives to perform before the people. See also the Midrash:

"And the Lord said furthermore to him: Put now your hand into your bosom” (*Shemot* 4:6). He said to him: Like the serpent, for when it slandered, I struck it with *tzara’at*, as it is stated: “Cursed (*arur*) are you from among all cattle” (*Bereishit* 3:14), and as it is stated: “A malignant *tzara’at*” (*Vayikra* 13:52). Rabbi Elazar said: The scales on its back are its *tzara’at*. So too you are fit to be struck with *tzara’at*. (*Shemot Rabba* 3, 13).

It should also be added that a *metzora* is considered as if he were dead and the serpent brings death into the world. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In the future, when the world will be repaired, childbirth and the impurity of a *yoledet* will also be repaired. "In the future a woman will give birth every day" (*Shabbat* 30b), without labor and without impurity (for were she to become impure, she would be unable to be intimate with her husband that night and give birth the next day). See also Seforno, *Bereishit* 3:16:

“Your travail” (*Bereishit* 3:16) — the opposite of what it was like before the sin, as it is stated: “On that day they were created, on that day they had relations, on that day they begat children” (*Bereshit Rabba* 22:3). And this is what they will be in the future, as it is stated: “In the future a woman will give birth every day.” And this is because Israel will find favor before God, as did Adam before he sinned. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This is opposed to the sacrifices brought all year round, for which the person brinigng the sacricifce adds: "And I repented before you" (Rambam, *Hilkhot Ma'aseh Ha-korbanot* 3:15). As a rule, acceptance for the future is one of the important components of repentance all year round. See, for example, the words of the Rambam concerning the components of repentance that are fulfilled by way of the confession:

He states: I implore You, God! I sinned, I transgressed, I committed iniquity before You by doing the following [= recognition of sin]. Behold, I regret and am embarrassed by my deeds [= regret]. I swear never to repeat this act again [= acceptance for the future]. (*Hilkhot Teshuva* 1:1)

The great importance attached to acceptance for the future is even more emphasized in the Rambam's definition of repentance:

What constitutes repentance? That a sinner should abandon his sins and remove them from his thoughts, resolving in his heart never to commit them again, as it is stated: “May the wicked abandon his ways” (*Yeshayahu* 55:7). Similarly, he must regret the past, as it is stated: “After I returned, I regretted” (*Yirmeyahu* 31:18). [He must reach the level where] He Who knows the hidden will testify concerning him that he will never return to this again, as it is stated: “We will no longer say to the work of our hands: you are our gods” (*Hoshea* 14:4). (*Hilkhot Teshuva* 2:2) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This reading appears also in the Rambam's text of the prayer, despite the fact that, as we have seen, apart from on Yom Kippur, the Rambam sees acceptance for the future as a fundmamental component of the *mitzva* of repentance. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)