**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 #08:**

**The Five Types of Affliction**

**Part I:**

**The Yom Kippur Service of All of Israel**

**I**

**The Mitzva of Affliction on Yom Kippur**

The service of the High Priest, which stands at the heart of the Torah section dealing with Yom Kippur, atones for all of Israel, but it is mainly performed by the High Priest alone. By contrast, at the end of that section there is a mitzva binding upon each individual member of Israel:

And it shall be a statute forever to you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day (*asor*) of the month, you shall afflict (*te’annu*) your souls. (*Vayikra* 16:29)

At the center of the mitzvaof affliction stands the obligation to refrain from eating and drinking (which are counted as one type of affliction, *innui*). This duty is joined by four additional types of affliction: refraining from washing one's body, from anointing oneself, from wearing leather shoes, and from engaging in marital relations; but these types of affliction are of lesser force than the obligation to fast.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**The Purpose of the Affliction**

We find two main understandings of the purpose of this affliction.

According to the first understanding, the affliction and distress come to contend with the sin. They reinforce a person's feelings of remorse about the sin, refine one of its consequences, and constitute a kind of atonement for or repair of it. The affliction aims to inflict upon a person suffering corresponding to the pleasure that one feels while committing the sin, and thereby to achieve atonement,[[2]](#footnote-2) or else to distance the person from seeking the pleasure that had led to the sin, and thereby to repair it.[[3]](#footnote-3)

According to this, at the heart of the obligation to undergo affliction stands the feeling of distress,[[4]](#footnote-4) or alternatively the avoidance of pleasure,[[5]](#footnote-5) which are both connected to the act of sinning. This understanding accords with the plain meaning of the term *innui* used by the Torah.

Alongside this explanation, we find another explanation in the words of our Rabbis. Affliction involves putting the material part of man to rest. Abandoning one's most important bodily functions elevates a person to the spiritual dimension. Eating is man's most basic material activity from birth to death, and therefore forsaking eating stands at the center of the obligation of affliction on Yom Kippur.

At first glance, the concept of "affliction" used by the verses does not support this explanation, because affliction and putting to rest are two different matters. However, another concept that appears in the Yom Kippur passage supports this direction. The Torah defines Yom Kippur as *shabbat shabbaton*, "a sabbath of sabbaths." Upon initial examination, it would appear that this phrase should be understood as referring to the prohibition of work on Yom Kippur, and not to the duty of affliction. However, in the two places where the term *shabbaton* appears in connection to Yom Kippur (*Vayikra* 16:31; 23:32), it is found in a verse dealing with the duty of affliction, not in verses addressing the prohibition of work. According to this, we can understand that the term *shabbaton* defines the nature of affliction, perhaps even more so than it defines the nature of the prohibition of work. Indeed, in *Torat Kohanim*, the types of affliction on Yom Kippur are derived from the word *shabbaton*:

And from where do we learn that, on Yom Kippur, eating, drinking, washing, anointing, having marital relations and wearing shoes are prohibited? Therefore the verse states "*shabbaton*" — abstain (*shevot*). (*Torat Kohanim, Emor* 11, 14)

This understanding finds expression in the words of the Rambam. The Rambam calls the laws of Yom Kippur *Hilkhot Shevitat Asor*, The Laws of Resting on the Tenth Day, and he places them immediately after the laws of Shabbat and *eiruvin*, not according to their place in the year among the various different festival days. In the body of these laws, he defines the *mitzva* of affliction as refraining from eating and drinking:

There is another positive commandment on Yom Kippur, to refrain (*li-shbot*) from eating and drinking, as it is stated: "You shall afflict your souls." According to the Oral Tradition, it has been taught: What is meant by afflicting one's soul? Fasting…

Similarly, according to the Oral Tradition, it has been taught that it is forbidden to wash, anoint oneself, wear shoes or engage in marital relations on this day. It is a *mitzva* to refrain from these activities in the same way one refrains from eating and drinking, as it is stated:"A sabbath of sabbaths." "A sabbath" implies refraining from eating; "of sabbaths," refraining from these activities. (*Hilkhot Shevitat Asor* 1:4-5)

We see then that the Rambam defines affliction as refraining from these bodily activities, not as a means of causing distress or preventing pleasure. This also follows from what he says in his *Guide for the Perplexed*:

The fast of Yom Kippur has also an evident reason consisting in establishing the notion of repentance. It is the day on which the master of the prophets descended with the second Tablets of the Law and brought [the Israelites] the good news that their great sin was forgiven. This day became forever a day of repentance exclusively consecrated to divine service. Therefore one must abstain on it from all corporeal pleasure and from all effort with a view to what is useful to the body — I mean, from work in various crafts — and confine oneself to confessions — I mean, to confessing one's sins and to turning away from them. (*Guide for the Perplexed* III, 43)

Bringing one's physical side to abstain from all corporeal pleasure is intended to fully clear one’s mind and thoughts for the work and consciousness of repentance.

The *Sefer Ha-chinukh* (#313) develops the conceptual meaning of this principle. He explains that the affliction comes to fortify man's spiritual dimension, "to strengthen one’s intelligent soul," and to that end it subdues and disables the workings of one’s material side which cause the soul to be "unenlightened and confused" and bring about a blurring of spiritual consciousness.

To summarize, we have seen two explanations of the *mitzva* of affliction on Yom Kippur. According to the first explanation, the *mitzva* of affliction comes to deal with the causes or the consequences of sin, whereas according to the second explanation, it comes to release the people from the physical plane and from the sin that generally comes from it, in order to elevate them to the spiritual plane. We will see later that while these two explanations differ from each other, they also complement one another.

**II**

**The Spiritual Meaning of Affliction**

**Affliction — Atonement and the Repair of Sin**

Let us return to the first explanation and examine the fact that the mitzvaof affliction focuses upon refraining from eating and drinking. Dealing with sin by way of fasting is very appropriate for sins committed through eating, as is stated in the *Tefilla Zaka* that many recite at the onset of Yom Kippur: "And for our abstaining from eating and drinking, grant us atonement for what we have sinned with forbidden foods and drinks." However, this fact raises a question: why is this kind of treatment instituted on Yom Kippur only for sins of eating, and not for all types of sin?[[6]](#footnote-6)

Assuming that the form of affliction corresponds to the content of the sin, concentrating the affliction in the realm of fasting teaches us that the sin of eating is perceived as the fundamental sin that Yom Kippur addresses.

**The Sin of Eating**

Why should the sin of eating be considered the fundamental sin for treatment? Let us consider the matter in light of the first instance in which eating represents the world of sin. The sin of Adam and Chava, which is the foundational sin in history, deals also with an event in which eating stands at its core. Before the sin, Adam is commanded to refrain from eating, and this is what is required of each individual on Yom Kippur in order to repair his or her sins.

According to the plain sense of the verses, Adam's entire "Torah" is focused on eating. He is given only one *mitzva*, with a positive side: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;" and a negative side: "But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it" (*Bereishit* 2:17). On Yom Kippur as well, which is a day of atonement for the violation of all of the Torah's commandments, the Torah of every Jew focuses principally on refraining from eating. Even though eating is the activity that gives man life, just as Adam is warned against eating, the direct consequence of which is death, "For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (ibid.), so too on Yom Kippur eating leads directly to excision and death: "For whatever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, it shall be cut off from its people" (*Vayikra* 23:29).[[7]](#footnote-7)

Why does eating underlie these two things, the sin of Adam and Chava and the affliction of Yom Kippur? Eating is the conduit through which God gives each individual his or her very life. The process of eating maintains the life force in each person. This force is the foundation of all other movements and actions, and thus also one’s sins. Therefore, the only commandment given to Adam is focused on eating, and in parallel fashion, on Yom Kippur, the day of general atonement, the Torah sets the focus on eating and abstaining from it, seeing as they are the foundation of human life. As with Adam and Chava, the treatment of eating becomes the center of the treatment of sin and the most important part of the Torah's mitzva*.*

The parallel between the sin committed by Adam and the service performed by the people of Israel on Yom Kippur teaches us also about the nature of the obligation of affliction. Affliction and abstaining from eating can be seen as treatment of the root of sin, and essentially, as treatment for and repair of Adam's sin, which in large measure is the root of sin in the world.[[8]](#footnote-8) Thus, for example, writes Rabbi Tzadok Ha-kohen of Lublin:

By way of the fast of Yom Kippur, when all of Israel waits a full day without any eating or drinking, and there is no allowance of it in the world, one certainly achieves, by way of this fast, full repair of the defect of Adam.[[9]](#footnote-9) (*Peri Tzadik, Devarim*, pp. 210-211)

The only instance in which the Torah requires fasting is Yom Kippur. Rav Tzadok teaches that this requirement comes to address Adam's sin of eating and to repair it.

How does the prohibited eating impair man's life force, and what aspect of it must be repaired? Adam's eating creates a mix of good and evil within man, and also causes his expulsion from the Garden of Eden into a world in which good and evil are mixed. Ever since, man has had to digest all of the food that enters the body, and to separate and excrete the waste in the food. This situation characterizes the nature of earthly reality in general. The reality that surrounds man contains good and evil that are intermingled, and with everything that one takes in, one must separate the good from the evil and excrete the waste. On the day on which the complete separation between good and evil takes place, i.e., on Yom Kippur,[[10]](#footnote-10) the people of Israel stop the eating that turns man into a mixture of good and evil, bringing more and more of this mixture into each person ever since. This cessation of eating creates purity.

**Fasting as a Repair of Defective Eating**

There appears to be an even deeper connection between Adam's sin and the affliction of Yom Kippur. According to the Gemara, Yom Kippur is not the first case in which fasting follows in the wake of sin. Adam responds to his sin with serial fasts:

Rabbi Meir said: Adam was a great saint. When he saw that through him death was ordained as a punishment, he spent a hundred and thirty years in fasting. (*Eiruvin* 18b)

Adam contemplates the consequences of his sin and brings about a radical change in his life. He embarks upon a new way of life centered on fasting.

Looking at the entirety of Adam's responses as they are described in the Gemara, we learn that fasting is not just a response that would have been appropriate for any sin, but rather a specific response stemming from the fact that he has committed a sin involving eating.

Fasting is not the only new feature of Adam's life after his sin. The Gemara continues by describing two additional responses (ibid.): "He severed connection with his wife for a hundred and thirty years, and wore clothes of fig [leaves] on his body for a hundred and thirty years." Adam's responses should be understood as specific treatment of his sin and its context. The fast came in response to his sin of eating; his severing connection with his wife follows from the fact that it is his wife who brings the sin upon him; and the wearing of fig leaves, in such a way that causes him suffering or mortification, is apparently based on the view that the Tree of Knowledge is a fig tree.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Adam's prolonged fasting on account of his sin earns him the title of "great saint," and it seems to parallel the obligation of affliction which binds every Jew on Yom Kippur. Accordingly, already in the time of Adam, fasting is seen as a means for atoning for sin and repairing it.

**Despair or Hope?**

In truth, however, the matter is not so simple. The Gemara confronts the words of Rabbi Meir with a more problematic statement, which gives rise to a more complex picture:

Rabbi Yirmeya ben Elazar further stated: In all those years during which Adam was under the ban he begot ghosts and male demons and female demons, as it is stated: "And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years and begot a son in his own likeness, after his own image" (*Bereishit* 5:3), from which it follows that until that time he begot not after his own image. (*Eiruvin* 18b)

This statement establishes that from the time that he separates from his wife, Adam begets creatures with a harmful nature, something which later turns out to be the price he pays for separating from his wife, separation that results in the wasting of his semen. The Gemara characterizes these years not as a period of drawing closer to God, but as a period of ostracism. No process of repair takes place; there is only a process of further damage.

The Gemara reconciles the gap between the statements by arguing that Adam ejaculated accidentally: "That statement was made in reference to the semen which he emitted accidentally" (ibid.), so that no deliberate sin is attributed to him. It should, however, be noted that Adam continues to act in that manner for a hundred and thirty years, despite the problematic consequences. Even if the consequences are unintended, he chooses to continue the conditions that make them possible. How then may we understand Adam's conduct?

Adam's response does indeed express deep remorse for his sin, but it is remorse that only eats away at the heart, without offering hope or a way out. It relates to the sin as something for which there can be no atonement, and expresses deep despair and the consciousness that we are dealing with irreparable damage. At first glance, this consciousness has all the components of repentance. There is recognition of the sin, deep remorse, and commitment regarding the future (which is also expressed by his restricted eating and frequent fasting), and yet it lacks something fundamental. Adam appears to have repented from the sin, but does not consider himself worthy or capable of returning to God. Following the decree that he be banished from the Garden of Eden, we do not find that Adam ever again turns or speaks to God. He makes peace with his expulsion and distancing, and wallows in the sorrow of his missed opportunity.

**Repentance and Confession**

Only repentance that is directed toward God contains also the hope of forgiveness and atonement. This follows from the words of the Rambam at the beginning of *Hilkhot Teshuva*:

After transgressing any of the commandsof the Torah, whether a positive command or a negative command — whether willingly or inadvertently— when one repents and returns from the sin, one must confess before God, blessed be He.

The Rambam does not write that a person must repent, but rather he describes the mental state of repentance; a person in that state is bound by an obligation to confess his or her sins before God: "When one repents and returns from the sin, one must confess before God." What is the relationship between the state of repentance and the obligation to confess that follows from it? It seems that repentance touches upon the relationship between the person and the sin and takes place within oneself, whereas confession refers to the relationship between the person and God. When, deep within oneself, one recognizes sin and feels remorse, one is bound by the obligation to remove that repentance from within one and appear with it before God by way of one’s confession. This is what opens the possibility of achieving atonement for the past and opening a new page filled with hope.

Adam's repentance remains within himself, without his directing it toward God and without trying to renew his connection to Him. On Yom Kippur, the people of Israel repent their sins not merely as a process within themselves, but also as a process between themselves and God. The Torah emphasizes: "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). The fast of Yom Kippur is similar in appearance to Adam's fast, but it is essentially different from it in that it is a fast of hope and repair, rather than a fast of deep despair. People struggle not only with sin. Mortifications and fasts that give expression to man's despairing of himself and of the world appear in human culture from the time of Adam, and they themselves require repair. This repair is achieved on Yom Kippur.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Eating and drinking on Yom Kippur are prohibited by Torah law, and one who eats or drinks is liable for excision. The other prohibitions do not bear liability for excision, and according to some opinions, they are not even prohibited by Torah law, but only by Rabbinic decree. For a summary of the different opinions, see *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Vol. 22, pp. 450-451, s.v. *Yom Kippur*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. We are dealing with passive mortification achieved by way of avoiding the activities mentioned above, and not with active mortification which comes to inflict pain and suffering. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A variation of the first understanding that relates to fasting as treatment of sin follows from the Gemara:

When Rav Sheshet kept a fast, on concluding his prayer, he added the following: Sovereign of the Universe, You know full well that in the time when the Temple was standing, a sinner would bring a sacrifice, and though all that was offered of it was its fat and blood, atonement was made for the sinner therewith. Now I have kept a fast, and my fat and blood have diminished. May it be Your will to account my fat and blood, which have been diminished, as if I had offered them before You on the altar and favor me. (*Berakhot* 17a). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Rashi (*Shabbat* 115a, s.v. *Mutar*), who states that the criterion for affliction is mental anguish. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Tosafot(*Yoma* 77a, s.v. *Minyan*), who state that only pleasurable anointing is prohibited. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. So too, the prohibition of marital relations, which can be seen as a repair of the transgression of violating the prohibitions of forbidden relations (something which also appears in the *Tefila Zaka*), may fit into this approach. However, the other prohibitions (washing, anointing and wearing shoes) do not relate directly to any sins, and do not stand in contrast to them. So too, the manner in which they appear in the *Tefila Zaka* indicates that we are not dealing with well-defined sins, but rather with general problems: "That which we have sinned with pleasures… that which we have sinned with legs rushing off to evil" (*Tefila Zaka*, *Machzor Rabba*, p. 21). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This stands in contrast to the prohibition of working on Yom Kippur, regarding which death is described not as a direct result, but as an intervention initiated by God: "And whatever soul it be that does any manner of work in that same day, that soul will I destroy from among its people" (*Vayikra* 23:30). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. As we explained in the *shiur* about atonement that purifies. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See, for example, the words of Rav Yitzchak Isaac Chaver:

And since food was ruined by the mixture of good and evil, by way of the sin of Adam, when he ate from the Tree of Knowledge, therefore we were commanded on Yom Kippur to abstain from eating and drinking, to be as pure and refined as the ministering angels, and to repair that which was ruined through the sin of Adam, the food of man. (*Siach Yitzchak*,no. 152) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. As explained in the *shiurim* dealing with the service of the goats. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See *Berakhot* 40a, and see also the words of the *Shela*:

Their intention with this is that in the matter with which he sinned, he brought about repair. He sinned because of the seduction of his wife; therefore he separated from his wife. And because he sinned with a fig, he came to repair with garments of fig leaves. (*Shenei Luchot Ha-berit*, *Rosh Hashana*, *Torah Or*, 17) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)