

6

Acharei



KI
VAYOM
HAZEH
YECHAPER

(#1)



(Likutei Torah, 25c–26d)



Summary of the discourse:

Speaking of Yom Kippur, the verse tells us, “For on this day He will atone for you.” Why use the word “He” instead of saying explicitly that “G-d” will atone?

To understand this, we must first appreciate the symbolism of the verse, “For G-d, your L-rd, is a consuming fire.” Like fire, the tendency of the G-dly energy that perpetuates creation is to return to its heavenly source. And, as flame is anchored by the wicks or logs it burns, so is G-d’s creative energy held in this physical world by Torah and mitzvos.

More specifically, the Torah and mitzvos can be grouped into the three broad categories of Torah, prayer, and charity, representing speech, thought, and action, respectively.

While all necessary and interdependent, the three are not equal in their effect. The flame held by a wick is small but pure; that of burning logs is abundant yet comparatively coarse. Similarly, the G-dly light of prayer is difficult to perceive, yet refined; while that of Torah and mitzvos is more far-reaching but not of the same quality.

The verse, “For G-d, your L-rd, is a consuming fire” has another important implication. To burn successfully, a fire’s fuel must be fit to be consumed. In order to successfully accomplish our objective in prayer, Torah study and acts of kindness, we must make ourselves into fitting fuel to hold the fire of G-d. We do this by cultivating bittul, total nullification before Him.

A question remains: How can Torah and mitzvos enable us to reach G-d, clothed as they are in earthly form? The answer is to be found in the verse, “I [G-d] am like a fresh cypress.” A young cypress tree can be bent over so that its top reaches down to its base; in that position, it can be

used as a catapult. Torah and mitzvos—even as they deal with eating, sleeping, and business—are like that lofty tree-top bent down to earth: they contain the very same G-dliness found at the top. They thus catapult us into the spiritual stratosphere, enabling us to achieve true bittul.

A parallel concept in the realm of unholiness is “foreign fire”—that is, when one’s thoughts, speech, and actions are not dedicated to G-d. Rather than a catapult propelling one **toward** G-d, evildoers are cast **away** from Him as out of a slingshot.

The remedy for that is to do teshuvah, to repent. G-d is especially receptive to this during the Ten Days of Penitence. To G-d’s very “Self,” so to speak, nothing we mortals do can possibly matter, so forgiveness is always possible. This sublime level is known as the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, symbolized by flint—which has the property of producing sparks. If the fire of spirituality has gone out within a person, because he or she has no Torah or mitzvos onto which it can grasp, one must relight the spark: repent so sincerely as to rouse the very highest degree of Divine compassion, the lofty level of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. Fire is ever latent and potentially available within the flint stone; it just needs to be struck and then it ignites anew.

That is why G-d is referred to obliquely in the verse quoted at the beginning. For the level being referred to, the level of flint, the source of atonement, is that sublime and exalted level that cannot be described by any name, even the Tetragrammaton. And that is why the verse concludes, “You will be purified before Havayah”—**before** the Tetragrammaton. That is, through sincere repentance on Yom Kippur, you will be brought to a level that transcends even that associated with the name of G-d.





Key topics to be covered in this discourse:

- ❖ Descent of the Soul into this World
- ❖ The Tenuous Grasp of Holiness Within the Physical World
- ❖ Torah and *Mitzvos* Are the Wicks and Logs Anchoring G-d's Fire in the World
- ❖ Prayer—"I Created It"—Thought
- ❖ Torah—"I Formed It"—Speech
- ❖ Three Kinds of Fuel
- ❖ *Bittul* is What Makes Our "Fuel" Fit to Burn
- ❖ The Holy Catapult: "I Am like a Fresh Cypress"
- ❖ Evil Casts One Away From G-d
- ❖ How to Do *Teshuvah*
- ❖ The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy: Relighting the Flame
- ❖ We Pray for G-d to Help Us Repent



The Torah portion of *Acharei* contains one of several references throughout the Torah to Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. We are told,¹ “For on this day He will atone for you, to purify you; you will be purified of all your sins before G-d.” The expression “He will atone for you” sounds like a reference to some prior verse in which, presumably, the one who will atone is identified. Yet this is not so; although it is clear from the context that the reference is to G-d, this is nowhere made explicit. Why, then, did the Torah not simply say, “For on this day, G-d will atone for you”? Why the oblique reference to G-d simply as “He”? The significance of the answer will be appreciated after the following discussion:

Descent of the Soul into this World

Yom Kippur is the day when repentance is most effective. The Hebrew word for “repentance”—*teshuvah*—literally means “return,” the idea being that one should strive to elevate one’s soul and return it to the pristine state of purity and union with G-d in which it existed before being born into this material world. This union is expressed by the Zohar’s comment² on the verse describing G-d’s creation of Adam,³ “And He blew into his nostrils the breath of life.” The Hebrew word for “breath” in this verse also means “soul,” and the Zohar seeks to explain the seemingly strange image of G-d “blowing” the soul into man. The Zohar states, “One who blows, blows from within

The Hebrew word for “repentance”—teshuvah—literally means “return.”

1. Leviticus 16:30.

2. Missing from extant texts but quoted in numerous later sources.

3. Genesis 2:7.



himself,” i.e., from deep within the person—as distinct from the relatively superficial breath of mere speech. Just blow strenuously a few times and you will agree that something of one’s inner vitality is expended thereby. After telling us that G-d created the world with ten **sayings** (“Let there be light, etc.”), the Torah relates that when it came time to give man a soul, this was not accomplished by just another spoken command, but by **blowing**—because the soul is of the inner Essence of G-d, as it were.

Why was it G-d’s will that the soul descend to this world, since teshuvah—elevation and return of the soul to its heavenly state—is not always successful?

The above underscores what an unimaginable descent it is for the soul to leave this sublime and lofty source in the Essence of G-d and plunge into the dark depths of this physical world.⁴ One wonders what could possibly justify this descent; why, in other words, was it G-d’s will that the soul descend at all, especially since *teshuvah*—elevation and return of the soul to its original state—is extremely difficult and not always successfully accomplished?

The Tenuous Grasp of Holiness Within the Physical World

To understand this, we must first understand the symbolism of the verse,⁵ “For G-d, your L-rd, is a con-

4. This descent is all the greater since it involves not merely the soul’s **distance** from G-d (metaphorically speaking, of course; there is really no such thing as “distance” from the Omnipresent), but a **qualitative** change in the soul. Originally, the soul was bound up in the very Essence of G-d—the Source and Root of all realms, the Light of the Blessed Infinite One (*Ein Sof*). To assume the role of a human soul, interacting with a physical body and driving its thoughts, speech, and actions in this material world, the soul—as it traversed the countless levels of progressively lower realms—had to gradually metamorphose into something (at least in a certain respect) qualitatively different. Thus, *teshuvah* entails not only elevating the soul to its original **place** in heaven, but restoring it to its former **quality** of inclusion within G-d Himself.

5. Deuteronomy 4:24.

suming fire.” It is the natural tendency of fire to reach upward. When one looks at a flame as it leaps and springs, one can easily imagine it is striving to break free of its moorings—the wick or logs which hold onto it, as it were—and rise up to the heavens. Yet there can be no disembodied, floating flame; a fire cannot even be truly called by that name unless it grasps onto and is held by some fuel, such as the wick or logs. If the energy that underlies fire is to be expressed, it must be anchored by something physical. Similarly, it is written of G-d’s word,⁶ “Behold, My word is like fire.” The symbolism of this is that the spoken words by which G-d created heaven and earth (the “ten utterances” referred to above, i.e., “Let there be light”; “Let there be a firmament,” etc.)—and, more to the point, the spiritual creative energy with which G-d imbued them—is like fire, in that the tendency of this G-dly energy is to return to its heavenly source rather than remain within creation.*

It is the natural tendency of fire to reach upward.

*It is written of G-d’s word, “Behold, My word is like fire.” Like fire, the tendency of the G-dly energy within creation is to return to its heavenly source.**

* *The analogy of G-d’s word to fire is also expressed in the human body. As explained elsewhere,⁷ the soul is said to have four elemental aspects—corresponding to fire, air, water, and earth—each of which can be mapped onto a specific part of the anatomy. The spiritual element of fire is said to reside in the heart, which is the seat of emotion and fiery passion. The spoken word is closely linked to the heart and is considered as originating there. Indeed, the breath that forms one’s speech is envisioned as ascending from the heart via the trachea.⁸ For this reason, even in a corporeal sense, the spoken word is associated with the element of fire. This association is hinted at by permutations of the Hebrew letters hei, veis,⁹ and lamed. In the order just given, these letters spell the word hevel,¹⁰ refer-*

6. Jeremiah 23:29.

7. See, e.g., *Tanya*, Part I, chap. 1; *Words of the Living G-d* 1:238–41.

8. For the spiritual symbolism of the trachea, see *Words of the Living G-d* 1:241–42.

9. The letter *veis* is the same as *beis*, except that the former is written without a dot, or *dagesh*, in the middle.

10. Lit., “nothingness” or “short breath.”



Just as earthly fire requires a physical mooring, so can the light of G-d only be called “light” when invested within the physical universe.

Furthermore, just as earthly fire requires a physical mooring, so can the light of G-d only be called “light” at all when it is invested within the physical, created universe.¹¹

Torah and Mitzvos Are the Wicks and Logs Anchoring G-d’s Fire in the World

Now, the word of G-d does in fact remain within creation, constantly revitalizing and renewing the existence of the universe, as it is written,¹² “Forever, O G-d, Your word stands firm in the heavens.” When G-d first created the universe, this investiture of His creative energy—the word of G-d—into the world was an act of pure kindness on His part; there was nothing which man had done (not yet having been created) to have deserved it. However, now that we do exist, it is incumbent upon us mortals to elicit that G-dly benevolence shown by His constant renewal of creation. This is accomplished through Torah and its *mitzvos*. These serve as the wicks and logs which hold the fire of G-d’s word within this world.

Torah and mitzvos are the wicks and logs anchoring G-d’s fire in the world.

ring to the air or breath that forms the spoken word. In the order hei, lamed, veis, the letters spell halev—“the heart.” Finally, the order lamed, hei, veis yields lahav, or “flame.”

11. In the original, the Alter Rebbe remarks that the details of this analogy—how it applies to the Light of the Blessed *Ein Sof*—are beyond the scope of this *maamar* and are explained elsewhere. He adds that a person blessed with intellectual discernment will be able to extrapolate the concepts and understand what is meant (“*vehamaskil yavin*”).

12. Psalms 119:89. See also Midrash *Tebillim* (known as Midrash *Shocheh Tov*) on this verse.

This is so because the 248 positive¹³ and 365 negative¹⁴ *mitzvos* parallel the 248 limbs and 365 organs that the Torah identifies within a person. One's limbs serve as vehicles for the expression of one's will (for example, the arm automatically extends as soon as the person wishes to perform some task; the limb serves as the expression of one's otherwise abstract will), and may be described as "garments" in which that will is clothed. Similarly, the *mitzvos* of the Torah express G-d's will within creation and are allegorically called its garments for that reason. This is all alluded to by the verse,¹⁵ "All who are called by My name and whom I created for My honor, whom I formed and made."¹⁶ Honor (*kavod* in Hebrew) is reflected in one's garments, as the Talmud relates,¹⁷ "Rabbi Yochanan called his garment [his] 'honor.'" Thus, the statement¹⁸ that everything in the universe was created for the honor of G-d¹⁹ implies that it is only by virtue of the "garments" of G-d—His will as expressed through *mitzvah*

The mitzvos of the Torah express G-d's will within creation.

The statement that everything was created for the honor of G-d implies that it is only by virtue of His will as expressed through mitzvah observance that the universe is sustained.

13. Such as, "put on *tefillin*."

14. Such as, "do not steal."

15. Isaiah 43:7.

16. This is the plain meaning of the verse, consonant with the Biblical cantillation marks and the interpretations of *Rashi* and *Radak*. An alternative reading, consistent with the interpretation of *Metzudas David*, flows well with the exposition in this *maamar*: "All that is called by My name and for My honor—I created it, I formed it, even did I make it."

17. *Shabbos* 113a.

18. Made explicit in the teaching (*Avos* 6:11), "All that the Holy One (may He be blessed) created in His world, He created solely for His honor."

19. The verse in Isaiah is interpreted by most commentators as referring to the Jews, or the righteous. Nevertheless, by extension, it implies that the entire universe was created for the honor of G-d, since (as *Rashi* quotes from our sages in his commentary to Genesis 1:1) the universe was created for the sake of the Jews and the Torah—i.e., the purpose of creation is for the Jews to fulfill the Torah. Thus, the universe itself was created to allow the Jews to express the honor of G-d—which, as will be explained shortly in the text, is accomplished through Torah and *mitzvos*. See also *Radak* ad loc., who states expressly that the verse can be interpreted as referring to the universe.



observance—that the universe is sustained.²⁰ *

* *This concept resolves an apparent incongruity. Our sages teach,²¹ “It is not the way of a king to speak of common things.” This expression is often applied to G-d, with the meaning that it is not fitting for the great and exalted G-d to involve Himself with the created universe at all.²² A great king possessing a vast treasury of gold and silver would not prattle incessantly about dust or about his clay pots; for the king, such speech would constitute nothing more than idle, frivolous chatter. How much more so can this be said of G-d, the King of kings: surely, it seems inappropriate for Almighty G-d, before Whom even the loftiest spiritual realms of heaven are as naught, to utter such relatively insignificant words as “Let there be light” and the other pronouncements by which this lowly world was brought into being. “It is not the way of a king to speak of common things!” However, the teaching that the universe was created for the honor of G-d, which is expressed through Torah and mitzvos, explains this. As the angels of heaven proclaim,²³ “Holy, holy, holy is the G-d of Hosts; the whole earth is filled with His honor.” That is to say, the whole earth is filled with G-d’s “garments”—it is specifically the earth, not the heavenly realms, that is filled with G-d’s honor, because it is only here that His honor can be reflected through Torah and mitzvos, the garments through which they are expressed. In short, while G-d would not ordinarily “bother” investing*

It is not the way of a king to speak of common things.

20. The foregoing verse and quote from the Talmud would read more smoothly if the word “glory” were substituted for “honor.” Indeed, that is their sense in English. However, it would not be technically accurate to translate it so. The Hebrew word for “glory” is *pe’er* or *tiferes*; it is actually the word for “honor”—*kavod*—that is used in the verse and the quote. The difference between *kavod* and *pe’er* (or *tiferes*)—between honor and glory—is that honor, *kavod*, is accorded a person by others, whereas glory, *pe’er*, is an intrinsic attribute of the person him- or herself (Rabbi Shlomo Aaron Wertheimer, *ביאור שמות הנרדפים בתנ"ך* [*Beor shamos hanerdofim shebaTanach: Commentary and Index of Synonyms in the Bible*] (Jerusalem: Ktav Yad V’Sefer, 1900), 267; but cf. Malbim on Exodus 28:2 and on Isaiah chap. 5). For example, in Esther 1:4, the king’s honor (*osher kvod malchuso*) derived from his great wealth, an external factor, whereas his glory (*yekar tiferes gedulaso*) was an inherent function of his being king. Therefore, perhaps we can make the following observation: the wording of the verse is precise, since G-d Himself did not need the world at all; He was just fine without it. However, it arose in G-d’s Will to create a world, which was to be sustained, as explained in the *maamar*, through Torah and *mitzvos*. These reflect the honor accorded Him by those who engage in them. G-d’s glory (*Tiferes*), by contrast, is intrinsic, and is, in fact, one of the ten *Sefiros*—inherent attributes of G-d.

21. See *Zohar* III:149b.

22. Nevertheless, of course, He does—as will be made clear in what follows.

23. Isaiah 6:3.

Now, we said above—in a general sense—that the Torah and its *mitzvos* are the wicks and logs that hold the fire of G-d's creative word in this world. More specifically, the Torah and *mitzvos* can be grouped into the three broad categories of Torah, prayer, and charity, corresponding to the three categories in the Mishnaic teaching,²⁷ “the world stands upon three things: on Torah, on worship (*avodah*) and on acts of kindness.” Furthermore, these three things can be

The Torah and mitzvos can be grouped into three broad categories: Torah, prayer, and charity.

His word and the creative energy it contains into this world, it was not frivolous for Him to do so—they were not merely “common things”—because of the Torah and mitzvos performed here.

Torah study as well, in addition to performance of its mitzvos, is called G-d's “honor,” and the verse quoted just above—“the whole earth is filled with His honor”—also applies to the Torah. That is, the “splendor²⁴ of the wrapping of His garment”—the Torah,²⁵ which is the Will and Wisdom of G-d—is what “fills the whole earth.” In fact, by the grammatical principal of gematria, the Hebrew word for honor, kavod, has a numerical value of 32—an allusion to the mystical “32 pathways of wisdom” by which the Torah proceeds from its “natural” state as G-d's incomprehensible wisdom to the point at which it is expressed in the Oral Torah, whose laws enable us mortals to understand its application to everyday life.²⁶

24. *Hod*, which, though not the same word as that used here for “honor” (*kavod*), or that meaning “glory” (see sup. n. 20), expresses a similar idea.

25. It is written (Psalms 104:2) that G-d “wraps [Himself in] light as [with] a garment.” The “light” referred to is Torah, as it is written (Proverbs 6:23), “Torah is light.” Thus, the Torah is called “the wrapping of His garment” (*maateh levusho*). See, e.g., *Tanya*, part 4 (*Iggeres HaKodesh*), chap. 23 (136a); *Maamarei Admur HaZakein* 5566 1:35a.

26. The intellectual faculty usually translated “wisdom” (*chochmah*) is actually the conceptual faculty, where new ideas spring to mind seemingly from nowhere. At that point, the idea is just a “germ”; one cannot quite grasp it and all its ramifications. The faculty of “understanding” (*binah*) is the next stage in the intellectual process: that in which an idea is fleshed out and fully developed. All potential implications of an idea are contained within the initial germ or nucleus of *chochmah*, and it is therefore possible for the same idea to lead in different directions. The 32 pathways of wisdom lead from *chochmah* to *binah*, and represent different paths in the development of an idea. Their mystical significance is alluded to in the text. See *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:1; Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (known as the *Ramak*), *Pardes*, twelfth “gate” (Gate of the Pathways); *Beurei HaZohar* of the *Tzemach Tzedek*, 472.

27. *Avos* 1:2.



identified with the three expressions of creation in the verse quoted above: “I created it (*berasiv*), I formed it (*yetzartiv*)...I made it (*asisiv*)”—which in turn correspond to thought, speech and action.

Prayer—“I Created It”—Thought

Prayer requires concentration, focus (kavanah); it corresponds to the expression “I created it.”

Prayer requires concentration, focus (*kavanah*): one must pay attention to what one is saying and have the requisite intent in one’s mind and heart. It is true that one must pronounce the words aloud, but this is primarily to help one focus.²⁸ In Hebrew, the word for “created” (*bara*) connotes bringing into being out of nothing. Likewise, thoughts spring into a person’s mind as from nowhere. This is why prayer, which is primarily a function of *kavanah*²⁹—thought and heartfelt intent—corresponds to the expression “I created it.”*

During prayer, one should strive to develop a heartfelt recognition that G-d is One with an all-encompassing unity.

In particular, what one should strive for during prayer is to cleave to G-d in one’s *kavanah* and thought, developing a heartfelt recognition that G-d is One with an all-encompassing unity, and that the worshipper, too, is a part of that. One should dedicate one’s

** This feature of prayer—its requirement of inner intent expressing one’s heart’s desire, that is, the will of one’s heart for G-d (r’usa deliba)—is consonant with the teaching³⁰ that, today, prayer takes the place of the sacrificial offerings in the Holy Temple. This is appropriate, as the sacrifices required the Kohen (priest) to perform them with proper intent and r’usa deliba.³¹*

28. *Beis Yosef*, Laws of Prayer, end of sec. 101.

29. Indeed, it is taught (e.g., Abravanel, *Yeshuos Meshicho* 12a; Abravanel and *Midrash Shmuel* to *Avos* 2:13), “Prayer without *kavanah* is like a body without a soul.”

30. *Berachos* 26a.

31. See *Zohar* I:51b, 100a.

very soul and one's entire will (*limsor nafsbo uretzono*) to G-d, arousing within oneself the sincere feeling that only G-d matters, and that one is totally subservient to Him. Indeed, one should have no will of one's own other than for G-d; this is expressed in practice as the wish that, by refraining from evil and doing good, one not be separated from G-d's unity and oneness—since, when one subjugates (*iskeafya*) one's will to G-d, one's soul is illuminated by G-dly light.

The form of our morning blessings is structured around the above theme and the idea that, as mentioned above, this manner of worship helps draw G-d's life-giving force down into this world. The formula, “Blessed are You, G-d our L-rd, King of the universe” may be parsed as follows: “Blessed” in Hebrew (*baruch*) connotes drawing forth. The first Divine name in the blessing (the Tetragrammaton, the ineffable four-letter name of G-d) symbolizes G-d as he transcends creation, G-d's very “self,” as it were; the second Divine name (*Elokeinu*, our L-rd) is associated with G-d's presence within creation.³² The idea is that we are beseeching G-d that the spiritual level represented by the first name—the transcendent level of G-d Himself—be drawn down and so thoroughly imbued within us that G-d can be called by the second expression—our (own) L-rd. That is, we seek to be so completely abnegated (*batel*) to G-d that we are the very embodiment of His will, and His name can there-

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32. The latter name is actually written with an “h” in place of the letter “k.” However, it is customary to write (and pronounce) it as it appears in the text—with a “k”—because it is forbidden to utter the name of G-d casually. (It is pronounced *Elo-beinu* in prayer or public reading of the Torah.) For more on the difference between the Divine names *Havayah* (G-d) and *Elokim* (L-rd), see, e.g., *Words of the Living G-d* 1:8–9.



This is accomplished through Torah and mitzvos.

fore be identified with us: “**our** L-rd,” just as our forefathers, who were totally *batel* to G-d, merited to have G-d called by their names (the G-d of Abraham, etc.). And since, as explained above, this is accomplished through Torah and *mitzvos*, which hold the fire of G-d’s life force within the world, it is through our achieving this that G-d is “King of the universe”^{*}—that is, that the creation from utter nothingness and continued existence of the entire universe is constantly renewed, by virtue of the word of G-d not departing from it as fire would tend to do.^{**}

**A king is of necessity somewhat removed from, and exalted over, the people;³³ a person could not rightly be called king over his sons even if he had a great many of them. Thus, G-d’s kingship implies a somewhat distant relationship with the universe. By contrast, we Jews are called sons of G-d;³⁴ our relationship with Him is uniquely close. In fact, as noted in the main text, we are utterly as naught before Him, as implied by the expression,³⁵ “a son is the foot of [i.e., subservient to] his father.”*

*** The constant creation of the universe ex nihilo and its maintenance as a created entity are entirely dependent upon the Jews drawing G-dliness upon ourselves and our bittul to G-d, for the Jewish souls are the inner aspect of all realms (pnimis haolamos), as it is taught,³⁶ “Just as it is impossible for the world [to exist] without winds [ruchos, also meaning “spirits” or “souls”], so is it impossible for the world [to exist] without Israel.” Since the textual format of blessings expresses this Jewish bittul, they are to be recited every morning, for morning—the dawn of a new day from the darkness of night—is the closest thing we have in this lower world to creation out of nothing.*

33. As implied by the etymological link between the word *am* (“nation”)—as in the expression, “There is no king without a nation” (*Emek HaMelech, shaar shaashvei bamelech*, beg. chap. 1; *Sefer HaChaim, Pereke Geulah*, chap. 2; Bachya, Genesis 38:30—and the word *omemus*, connoting separateness or concealment (see Radak and Metzudas Tzjion to Ezekiel 31:8).

34. *Avos*, 3:14.

35. *Yonas Eilem*, beg. chap. 2; see *Tosafos* s.v. *mekamei* to *Yevamos* 3a.

36. *Taanis* 3b.

Torah—“I Formed It”—Speech

The expression “I formed it” is associated with speech. This is because speech is not really created from nothing; rather it is an expression of what had previously existed in one’s thoughts. One is merely forming and ordering the thoughts into words.³⁷

Whereas, as just explained, thought corresponds to prayer, speech therefore corresponds to Torah, which is primarily studied aloud and taught to others, as in the verses,³⁸ “And you shall teach them [the words of Torah] to your children and you shall speak in them,” and³⁹ “And you shall speak of it day and night.”⁴⁰ *

Whereas thought corresponds to prayer, speech corresponds to Torah, which is studied and taught aloud.

* Nevertheless, speech is distinct from thought. This is evidenced by the fact that, with respect to the obligation to recite the Shema prayer aloud (as well as regarding what is permitted to be discussed on Shabbos) the law is that⁴¹ “thought is not equivalent to speech,” so that one does not satisfy one’s obligation with mere thought.

Although Torah is considered spiritually superior to prayer, as our sages have taught,⁴² “Torah study surpasses them all,” there is no contradiction in identifying Torah with speech and prayer with the relatively superior level of thought. This is because, as is known to mystics, the higher something is in terms of its spiritual source, the lower the level at which it can come to open revelation. Thus, precisely because Torah’s source is among

37. In the *maamar*, the Alter Rebbe refers to **letters** of speech and **letters** of thought, and makes the point—using terms familiar from classical philosophy—that letters of thought can be considered a type of “substance” (*chomer*), which letters of speech express in a particular “form” (*tzurah*). For more on the concept of letters, see *Words of the Living G-d* 1:241–42.

38. Deuteronomy 6:7.

39. Joshua 1:8.

40. The Hebrew word translated here as “you shall speak,” *vebagisa*, is commonly rendered as “you shall meditate,” following the interpretation of the major commentators. However, it can also connote emitting sound, as in the verse (Psalms 115:7), “they cannot speak (*yehegu*) from their throat.” See also *Metzudas Tzion* ad loc.

41. *Berachos* 20b; *Tur Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim*, sec. 62; *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* 62:3; *Shabbos* 150a.

42. *Peab* 1:1.



The expression “I made it,” which corresponds to action, is associated with acts of charity.

Finally, the expression “I made it,” which corresponds to action, is associated with acts of charity.⁴⁵

Three Kinds of Fuel

The flame held by a wick is small, but pure and refined. The fire of burning logs is abundant, yet comparatively coarse.

In sum, we draw down G-dliness into the world through prayer, Torah study, and acts of charity, respectively corresponding to thought, speech and deed. Nevertheless, the three are not equal in their effect. To return to the metaphor of wicks and logs for the fire of G-dliness, a wick and a log are not the same either. The flame held by a wick is small, but it is of a pure and refined quality. On the other hand, the fire of burning logs is abundant and mighty, yet comparatively coarse. Similarly, the G-dly light associated with the “thought” of prayer is small in the sense that, compared with the light of action, its spiritual effect is not as broadly felt within the world, and is difficult to per-

the highest spiritual levels—in G-d’s blessed Supernal Will (Ratzon HaElyon), which is known as “Hiddenmost of all things hidden” (Sesima dechol sesimin)⁴³—it is not possible for its light to be received in an open manner until it has descended all the way down and clothed itself in a form dealing with the physical aspects of this world, and actually been articulated in speech. This is hinted by the verse,⁴⁴ “the voice is the voice of Jacob.” It is through its investiture within the actual breath forming the spoken words of Torah study that the G-dly light hidden within His Torah shines openly forth to animate all higher and lower realms.

43. *Idra Zuta; Zohar* II:142a; III:292a; and elsewhere.

44. Genesis 27:22.

45. Charity is considered to include all other actions, because, as a general proposition, all one’s planning, discussion, and activities, all one’s talent and effort, are involved in the goal of earning money. When one then contributes that money to charity, all the underlying effort and activity that went into earning it are elevated to a higher purpose, rendered holy and a *mitzva*.

ceive, yet is of a very refined, superior quality.* The G-dly light of action, by contrast—*mitzvah* observance and Torah study, which is also action in the sense that⁴⁶ “moving his lips is [considered] action”—is more far-reaching and its effect in animating the universe is more revealed. Indeed, it is said that action is the main thing, as implied by the Biblical phrase,⁴⁷ “today, to do them”: the entire purpose of our descent to this world⁴⁸ is to draw down G-d’s light from the very pinnacle of spiritual heights and cause it to shine openly precisely here, in the very depths of this physical world.⁴⁹ Still, for all its broad effect, this light is not of the same superior quality as that of thought.

The G-dly light of thought—prayer—is difficult to perceive, yet very refined. The G-dly light of action—Torah and mitzvos—is more far-reaching, yet not of the same quality.

Despite the above, all are necessary and interdependent. This is comparable to the fact that a person’s thoughts are subtle and their physical effect, though vital, is imperceptible; while gross motor activity like walking has actual and obvious effects that are perceptible to all, yet is on a qualitatively lower level than brain activity. Clearly, however, both brain and body—

Nevertheless, all are necessary and interdependent.

* *This is why we search for chametz, which symbolizes the materiality and coarseness of this physical world, by the light of a candle—for beirur (the extraction of spirituality and holiness from the physical) is a function of thought.*

46. *Bava Metzja*, 90b; *Sanbedrin*, 65b. These Talmudic references establish the principle in different contexts, but, as we find in this discourse, the concept is often applied to prayer and Torah study as well.

47. Deuteronomy 7:11.

48. This world is called “today,” as distinct from the hereafter, which is called “tomorrow.” It is mainly a time for action, for doing *mitzvos*, as it is taught (*Erwin* 22a), “Today [is when we are] to do them, and not tomorrow”; likewise, we find (*ibid.*), “Today is to do them; tomorrow is to receive their reward.”

49. The original uses the same language here as earlier regarding Torah study: it originates *berom bamaalos* (“at the highest levels”) yet is expressed openly only *besof maaseh* (“at the farthest reaches of [this physical world of] action”).



thought and action—are necessary and interdependent, for the brain drives the legs and the legs move the brain.

Bittul is What Makes Our “Fuel” Fit to Burn

To burn successfully, a fire’s fuel must be fit to be consumed.

The verse, “For G-d, your L-rd, is a consuming fire” has another important implication. To burn successfully, a fire’s fuel must be fit to be consumed. Fresh, green logs, for example, will not burn as well (if at all) as dry tinderwood. Just as the fuel must be properly prepared so that the fire should be a **consuming** fire, so must we, in order to successfully accomplish our objective in prayer, Torah study and acts of kindness, make ourselves into fitting fuel to hold the fire of G-d.

By cultivating bittul before G-d, we enable the fuel of our Torah and mitzvos to hold His fire.

We do this by cultivating that *bittul*, that total nullification before G-d, referred to above. When a person truly considers his or her own will insignificant in deference to G-d’s will, and sincerely longs—even pines—for closeness to Him, then, through his or her prayers, Torah study, and acts of charity, the consuming fire of G-d’s light will be better able to take hold of and dwell within his or her soul.*

That is why the elicitation and renewal of G-d’s life-giving force into the world through Torah and

* *This is in accordance with the principle⁵⁰ that “Spirit brings spirit and draws forth spirit,” that is, when a person’s spirit yearns for G-d, then G-d’s Spirit, so to speak, responds in kind by coming forth to rest upon that person.*

50. See *Zohar* II:162b.

mitzvos depends upon the Jews—as it says,⁵¹ “For He established a Testimony [*eidus*, a reference to *mitzvos*] in Jacob and appointed a Torah in Israel.” This can be accomplished only by one who is absolutely nullified (*batel*) before G-d, which involves subjugation (*iskafya*) of our worldly impulses and actual transformation (*is’hapcha*) of these impulses into good. Only the Jews have this capacity, as implied in this very verse—for the name “Jacob” refers to the capacity for *iskafya* and the name “Israel” to the capacity for *is’hapcha*.

Only the Jews have this capacity.

The Holy Catapult: “I Am like a Fresh Cypress”

However, are not the Torah and its *mitzvos* encloded within a guise that we mortals can relate to? Do they not discuss everyday, worldly matters like, “eat this kind of food,” or “if you have a business dispute, here is the law”? How is it possible, given that our conception of the holiness of Torah and *mitzvos* is limited to their worldly manifestation, for us to achieve, through them, such a pure degree of *bittul* to G-d and G-d alone that the very life force of the universe is perpetuated thereby? The answer is to be found in the verse,⁵² “I [G-d] am like a fresh cypress.” A thin cypress tree, which is young and fresh, can be bent over so that its top reaches down to its base;⁵³ in that position, it can be used as a catapult. When released, an object placed on the bent-over top will be propelled to the highest heights. So it is with the G-dli-

How can Torah and mitzvos, in their worldly form, enable us to reach G-d?

“I [G-d] am like a fresh cypress”: a young cypress tree can be bent over so its top reaches its base. In that position, it can be used as a catapult.

51. Psalms 78:5.

52. Hosea 14:9.

53. Cf. the comments of *Rashi*, *Radak*, and *Metzudas David* ad loc.



ness within the Torah and *mitzvot*, alluded to in the verse by the word, “I.” A person can have many names and descriptions—like “Sam,” or “wise”—but the word “I” signifies a degree of identity with the person’s self that cannot be expressed in any name or description. Indeed, the only one who can use the word “I” is the person him- or herself; no one else can access that essential level. “I am like a fresh cypress” means that although, indeed, we are at ground level, so to speak, G-d makes His spirituality available to us anyway by clothing it in the worldly form of Torah and *mitzvot*. But the secret is that the Torah and *mitzvot* as we know them—even as they deal with eating, sleeping, and business—are like that lofty treetop bent down to earth: they contain the very same G-dliness found at the top, symbolized by the word “I.” For this reason, Torah study and *mitzvah* performance catapult us into the spiritual stratosphere, and enable us to achieve true *bittul* to G-d Himself.

Torah study and mitzvah performance catapult us into the spiritual stratosphere.

Evil Casts One Away From G-d

Now, it is written,⁵⁴ “G-d made one thing opposite the other.”⁵⁵ Just as there is a concept of G-d’s word as a consuming fire—the G-dly life force animating creation—that is held within the world by our thought, speech, and action in the areas of prayer, Torah study,

54. Ecclesiastes 7:14.

55. The preceding portion of this verse speaks of good times and bad, and, in context, the plain meaning of the verse is that both come from G-d: “G-d made the one as well as the other.” However, the Sages (*Chagigab* 15a) interpret it to mean that everything in the world has its counterpart. Spanning both interpretations, the verse is often—as here—quoted in *Chassidus* for the proposition that everything in the realm of holiness has a parallel in the realm of unholiness and vice-versa. For examples of this phenomenon with respect to the Biblical figures of Laban and Pharaoh, respectively, see *Words of the Living G-d* 1:151–52, and *ibid.*, chap. 10.

and *mitzvah* performance, there is a parallel concept in the realm of unholiness: a “foreign fire,”⁵⁶ contained within one’s thoughts, speech, and actions that are not dedicated to G-d. The result is shameful, as opposed to the honorable consequences of worshipping G-d properly—as it is written,⁵⁷ “The wise will inherit honor, [whereas] the foolish will get disgrace.” Specifically, instead of the catapult propelling one toward G-d (in a manner of speaking), raising it to a plane beyond the soul’s ordinary reach, where it is literally “bound in the bundle of life, with G-d,”⁵⁸ evildoers are cast **away** from Him as out of a slingshot, as it is said of evil,⁵⁹ “May He fling the souls of your enemies as from the hollow of a sling”⁶⁰—far, far away from the light of G-d’s countenance⁶¹ (may Hashem protect us from such a thing!), as it is written,⁶² “I will utterly hide My face on that day because of all the evil.”

*“Foreign fire”:
when one’s
thoughts,
speech, and
actions are not
dedicated to
G-d.*

*Rather than a
catapult propelling one
toward G-d,
evildoers are
cast **away**
from Him as
out of a sling-
shot. What a
horrible
thought!*

What a horrible thought! To be flung (G-d forbid) far, far from G-dliness! Whatever can one do to get

56. This expression is derived from Leviticus 10:1, in which it is applied to the unauthorized offering of Aaron’s sons, Nadav and Avihu.

57. Proverbs 3:35.

58. I Samuel 25:29.

59. In the very same verse, *ibid*.

60. For more on the spiritual concept of the “hollow of a sling,” see the discourse *Tzav Es Bnei Yisrael...Es Karbani Lachmi, Likutei Torah, Pinchas*, 75c.

61. It is, of course, impossible to be far from G-d Himself, since, fundamentally, He is everything and everywhere. Rather, the text is discussing the closeness of our **relationship** with G-d. The meaning of the expression “the light of G-d’s countenance” lies in the fact that two people can be standing right next to one another, yet if they are loving and open, they will gaze directly into each other’s face, while if they are hostile and closed, they may turn their backs on one another. Thus, for example, in the Priestly Blessing (Numbers 6: 24–26; bestowed during holiday prayers by the *Kohanim*), we say “May G-d shine [the light of] His countenance unto you.” (Interestingly, we use this same image in English, when we describe someone as “beaming.”) By contrast, sinners are described (Jeremiah 2:27) as having “turned their backs to Me instead of their faces.” See also the discussion of the spiritual concept of *achorayim* in the adaptation of the discourse, “*LeHavin Ma SheKasav BaHaggadah, Matzah Zo SheAnu Ochlin*,” *Words of the Living G-d*, vol. 6 (holidays).

62. Deuteronomy 31:18.



The remedy is to “do teshuvah.” G-d is especially receptive to this during the Ten Days of Penitence.

back, to “come home again,” if one is in that situation? The remedy is to “do *teshuvah*,”⁶³ to repent—to return to G-d. G-d is especially receptive to this during the “Ten Days of Penitence,” the period from Rosh HaShanah to Yom Kippur. One should feel bitter regret at having drifted so far from the light of G-d’s countenance, and (as the verse says),⁶⁴ “He should return to G-d and He will have compassion on him.” Likewise, it is written,⁶⁵ “They should cry out to G-d in their pain [over their sins].”

How to Do Teshuvah

The fundamental point of *teshuvah* is in accordance with the verse,⁶⁶ “I lift up my soul unto You, O G-d”: this means that one dedicates oneself entirely to G-d, nullifying one’s own will (*bittul*) in deference to Him to the point that one’s only wish is to do the will of his or her Father in heaven with yearning and sincere pining of the soul (*tesbukab u’cblos hanefesh mamash*). One should also beseech G-d that His light and favor⁶⁷ rest upon him or her and help him or her to achieve this *bittul* to begin with. That is what we mean when we say in our penitential prayers, *selach lanu, mechal lanu*—“pardon us, forgive us.” After all, what does it mean to ask G-d to forgive us? Have we really harmed Him, have we really caused Him some sort of grief, for which we want Him to forgive us? Of course not; that is

What does it mean to ask G-d’s forgiveness? Have we really harmed Him?

63. The expression, “do *teshuvah*” is much more common in English than in Hebrew. Nevertheless, that is how it is phrased here: *asos bateshuvah*.

64. Isaiah 55:7.

65. Psalms 107:13.

66. Ibid., 25:1.

67. Heb., or *Hashem u’retzono*.

absurd—as the verse says,⁶⁸ “If you have sinned, what do you [really] do to Him?” Rather, our asking G-d’s forgiveness means we seek the renewal of His favor; the restoring of G-d’s light, which should once again illuminate us and help us to worship Him wholeheartedly.

Our asking G-d’s forgiveness means we seek the renewal of His favor, the restoring of His light.

Specifically, a person should realize that G-d is inexpressibly exalted above the universe, so much so that all of creation, from the beginning of time until the end of time and including all that ever happened anywhere, is no more to G-d than a single fleeting memory. Yet G-d, in His infinite compassion, deigned to turn His attention, as it were, to the creation and constant maintenance of this utterly insignificant universe anyway. Only out of G-d’s great compassion for the otherwise unimportant universe did He compress, as it were, His infinite life force and channel it into creation. When one truly internalizes this realization, one will be so appalled at having spurned the favor and transgressed the will of the great G-d that one will arouse a bitter pity within oneself, pity on one’s own soul, which one’s sins have flung so very, very far away from home. And what is one’s home, one’s origin? It is none other than that inexpressible level of G-dliness that cannot be described by any term other than “Where,” as our Sages have advised,⁶⁹ “Know from where you came.” This can also be interpreted to mean, “Know—truly realize—that you came from that exalted level known only as ‘Where’”—the level of G-d as Compassionate Father Who deigned to create the universe for our sake, not His. Thus, how much

Only out of G-d’s great compassion did He compress His infinite life force into creation. When one realizes this, one will be so appalled at having spurned the favor that one will feel bitter pity for one’s own soul.

68. See Job 35:6.

69. *Avos* 3:1.



This bitterness over one's sins and pity on one's fallen soul will finally pierce to the core of one's heart, causing him or her to return to G-d at last.

greater is one's descent—"from a high peak into a deep pit"⁷⁰—through sinning, and how much greater the pity on one's poor soul that fell so far. It is this bitterness over one's sins and pity on one's fallen soul that will finally pierce to the core of one's heart, causing him or her to yearn for G-d heart and soul and return to Him at last. It is this quality of repentance, referred to as *teshuvah* motivated by *abavah rabbah* ("Great Love" for G-d), about which it is said,⁷¹ "Deliberate sins are transformed for [the penitent] into merits." That is, just as merits elevate one's soul into the light of G-d, so does this great bitterness over one's sins. In fact, "In the place where penitents stand, even complete saints cannot stand."⁷²

The above dynamic is hinted at in one of the additional sentences added to our *Shemoneh Esreh* prayer during the Ten Days of Penitence: "Who is like You, Compassionate Father, Who remembers His creatures for life, with mercy." By realizing how great is G-d's compassion on the insignificant and undeserving universe, in that He created it despite it being like a mere fleeting remembrance to Him, the person, in turn, will be aroused to compassion on his or her soul—leading, as explained above, to successful *teshuvah*.

70. See *Chagigab*, 5b.

71. *Yoma* 86b.

72. *Berachos*, 34b; *Sanhedrin*, 99a.

The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy: Relighting the Flame

When the Jews committed the unspeakable sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe (Moses) was shown by G-d the way to arouse such a high level of G-d's mercy that even this would be overlooked—for to G-d's very "Self," so to speak, nothing we mortals do can possibly matter (as mentioned above), so forgiveness is always possible—if we can only tap into that essential level of G-dliness. This sublime level is known as the "Thirteen Attributes of Mercy," and in preparing to reveal it, G-d told Moshe,⁷³ "I will place you in a cleft of the rock." In this verse, the word for "rock," *tzur*, refers specifically to flint, which has the property of producing sparks. This symbolizes the exalted level of G-d's merciful forgiveness that we are discussing. In the ordinary course of spiritual affairs, "G-d your L-rd is a consuming fire," which we have explained as a reference to the spirituality accessed by the Jews through Torah and *mitzvos*—the wicks or logs that allow G-d's creative word a hold in this material world. However, one who has transgressed, G-d forbid, may be on such a low spiritual level that it is as though the fire of spirituality has gone out within him or her, because he or she has no Torah or *mitzvos* onto which it can grasp. In that case, one must "relight the spark": one must repent so thoroughly and sincerely as to rouse the very highest degree of Divine compassion, the lofty level

To G-d's very "Self," so to speak, nothing we mortals do can possibly matter, so forgiveness is always possible. This sublime level is known as the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.

73. Exodus 33:22.



Fire is ever latent within the flint stone. It just needs to be struck and then it ignites anew. So can one's G-dly fire be rekindled through the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.

of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. This is associated with flint, which transcends fire in the sense that, even if there is no actual fire, fire is ever latent and potentially available within the flint stone. It just needs to be struck and then it ignites anew. Similarly, the Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy transcend the “consuming fire” of G-d’s creative word; even if that fire has nothing to consume and has gone out (G-d forbid), it can be rekindled through the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.*

A penitent achieves this by coming to such a state of bitterness over sin, and disgust over his or her worldly existence, that he or she reaches to the very core of his or her soul—which transcends time and space and has no interest whatsoever in temporal or spatial concerns. On that level, one is able to access the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, which likewise precede

** G-d's creative fire is associated with the Tetragrammaton, the first Divine name in the verse, “For G-d your L-rd is a consuming fire.” This is actually quite straightforward: the Tetragrammaton, Havayah, literally means “existence” or “being”; it is the Divine name through which the universe is created out of utter nothingness, and is therefore described in the verse as a consuming fire, for the reasons discussed in this maamar. The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, by contrast, represent the very source of the source of all existence—a level of G-dliness even deeper, as it were, than the name Havayah; the flint from which the consuming fire springs. This concept underlies expressions like,⁷⁴ “Look to the rock (tzur) from which you were bawn,” and⁷⁵ “Rock (tzur) of our life”: such expressions imply that the spiritual level of tzur is the antecedent from which life and existence themselves are drawn.*

74. Isaiah 51:1.

75. *Shemoneh Esreh* prayer, benediction beginning, “*Modim*.”

time and space.* This is illustrated by the incident of R. Elazar ben Durdaya,⁷⁸ a profligate sinner who lived in Mishnaic times. Eventually, he repented from the depths of his heart and expired from longing for G-d, whereupon, the Talmud relates, a heavenly voice proclaimed him destined for the life of the World to Come. Now, this seems impossible, since in the World to Come, the righteous enjoy the radiance of the Torah and worship⁷⁹ they performed in this life—and R. Elazar ben Durdaya had no Torah or *mitzvos*. However, in light of what we have just said, this makes sense: R. Elazar ben Durdaya had repented so sincerely that he reached the level of the Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy, which transcends the Torah and *mitzvos*. He had succeeded in attaching himself to the Source and Root of all, including of the Torah and *mitzvos*, and therefore he did not need them to enable him to experience the G-dliness of the World to Come.

R. Elazar ben Durdaya repented so sincerely that he reached the level of the Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy.

** This is hinted in the Biblical episode recounting Moshe's arousal of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. In the verse introducing the statement about the cleft of the rock, G-d said,⁷⁶ "There is a place with Me." Usually, when one speaks of spatial location in relation to oneself, one says something like, "I am in a place." The expression, "There is a place with Me" reverses that order, because G-d is not found within space; on the contrary, time and space themselves originate within G-d. As Rashi quotes,⁷⁷ "The Holy One, may He be blessed, is the space of the world; His world is not His space."*

76. Exodus 33:21.

77. Ad loc. See *Midrash Tehillim* (known as *Shocheh Tov*), 90:10; *Bereishis Rabbah* 68:10; *Pesikta Rabbasi* 21:10; *Pesikta Zutrasa, Berachah*, 33:27; *Zohar* III:242a.

78. *Avodah Zarab*, 17a. Although he had been a sinner, his name is customarily preceded by the title "Rabbi" (or, more informally, "Reb"), as the Talmud states of him (ad loc.), "Rebbe [Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi] said, 'Not only are [such] penitents accepted [back into the fold], they are called "Rabbi."'"

79. See *Berachos*, 17a.



We Pray for G-d to Help Us Repent

Not every person merits to reach this exalted level.

That is why we ask G-d for His assistance in doing so.

Not every person, however, merits to reach this exalted level. That is why we ask G-d for His assistance in doing so, as we pray,⁸⁰ “Return us to You, O G-d, and we will return; renew our days as of old.” We ask G-d to first return us to Him—that is, to initiate the process and motivate us from Above to achieve the sincere level of repentance we have been discussing—and then we, for our part, will be able to successfully return to Him. And although, usually, one should first do one’s own part and only then expect heavenly assistance,⁸¹ we ask G-d to bypass this rule and “renew our days as of old”—just as when G-d originally created the universe, He did not do so in response to our merit, but out of His own infinite goodness.*

That is why G-d is referred to obliquely in the verse quoted at the beginning.

Finally, that is why G-d is referred to obliquely in the verse quoted at the beginning. “For on that day [Yom Kippur, the time of true *teshuvah*] **He** will atone for You”—for the level being referred to is that sublime and exalted level of “He Who has no specific name and cannot be described by name, and cannot [even] be hinted at by any letter or calligraphic flourish

** The wording, “Renew our **days** as of old” is apt, since “days” represent the bestowal of G-dly light, in accordance with the verse,⁸² “No more shall the sun be your light by day... [instead,] G-d will be your everlasting light.” What we are asking is for G-d to bestow upon us a new light from the level of the flint discussed above, even though the original light of G-d’s consuming fire has gone out, leaving us in darkness, as it were.*

80. Quoting Lamentations 5:21.

81. That is, in the terminology of *Chassidus*, “arousal from below” (*isarus delesata*) must precede “arousal from above” (*isarus dele'eila*). See chaps. 1 and 4, above.

82. Isaiah 60:19.

whatsoever.” Forgiveness and atonement stem from this transcendent level, for, as discussed above, no sin can possibly affect G-d Himself. This is the level of the flint stone, which is even higher than the Tetragrammaton; higher than the “consuming fire.” And that is why the verse concludes, “You will be purified **before** *Havayah*”—before the Tetragrammaton. That is, you will be brought to a level that transcends even that associated with the name of G-d.⁸³ *

“You will be purified before Havayah”—you will be brought to a level that transcends even the name of G-d.



* Rabbi Moshe Zacuto (1625–1697; known by his initials, Ramaz), in his commentary on the Zohar,⁸⁴ points out that, by the rules of gematria, the Hebrew word for “you will be purified” (tit’haru)—like the word for “crown,” kesser—has a numerical value of 620. This is the total number of mitzvos, when the seven rabbinical commandments⁸⁵ are added to the 613 found in the Bible. This is significant, since there are 620 “columns of light”—that is, distinct forms of transmission of G-dliness into the world—and each is elicited through one of the 620 mitzvos. If (G-d forbid) a person has transgressed one of those mitzvos, he or she has caused the corresponding spiritual influence to be defective or lacking from his or her soul. The solution is teshuvah, since that is so powerful (as explained in the main text) that it is able to fill in whatever might be missing. That is why the word tit’haru, “you will be purified” through teshuvah, adds up to 620.

83. It will be remembered that the name *Havayah* literally means, “being” or “existence.” Sincere *teshuvah* on Yom Kippur brings one to a level that precedes that at which G-d’s creative vitality, which brought the universe into being, emanated from Him to begin with.

84. Found in *Mikdash Melech*, end of *Parshas Acharei*.

85. The Rabbis enacted seven *mitzvos*, generally accepted to be the *mitzvos* of: washing the hands prior to eating bread; *eruv* (the formal combining of two or more things to achieve a purpose under Jewish law, such as permitting *Shabbos* food to be prepared on Friday when that day is itself *Yom Tov*); blessings; lighting *Shabbos* candles; hearing the reading of the *Megillah* on Purim; lighting Chanukah candles; and reciting the *Hallel* prayer. (These can be remembered by the mnemonic, ג' ע' ב' ש' ט' ה' נ'.) For an analysis of different opinions as to how many and which specific *mitzvos* are included, see *Likutei Sichos*, 21:401–2. See also *Mitzvos Hashem* (sec. headed Day 25, Seven Rabbinical Commandments, found on p. 81), where it is suggested that *Sefer HaChinuch* counts these particular seven because they are truly *mitzvos* (evidenced by our reciting a blessing over them, except that we do not recite a blessing over the *mitzvah* of reciting a blessing) and are truly rabbinic in origin.



Practical lessons to be derived from this discourse:

1. Like fire, the tendency of the G-dly energy within creation is to return to its heavenly source. Torah and *mitzvos* are the wicks and logs anchoring G-d's fire in the world. (pp. 150–54)
2. During prayer, one should cleave to G-d in *kavanah* and thought, developing a heartfelt recognition that G-d's unity encompasses all. Our morning blessings help draw G-d's life-giving force into the world. (pp. 156–58)
3. *Bittul* enables the fuel of our Torah and *mitzvos* to hold the fire of G-d's energy in the world. (p. 162)
4. The Torah and *mitzvos* as we know them—even as they deal with eating, sleeping, and business—are like a lofty treetop bent down to earth: they contain the very same G-dliness found at the top, and catapult us into the spiritual stratosphere. (pp. 163–64)

5. G-d is especially receptive to *teshuvah* during the “Ten Days of Penitence,” the period from Rosh HaShanah through Yom Kippur. One should feel bitter regret at having drifted so far from G-d, and dedicate oneself entirely to Him. (*pp. 166–68*)
6. Only out of G-d’s great compassion did He compress His infinite life force into creation. When one realizes this, one will be so appalled at having spurned the favor that one will feel bitter pity for one’s own soul and will return to G-d at last. (*p. 167*)
7. To G-d’s very “Self,” so to speak, nothing we mortals do can possibly matter, so forgiveness is always possible. This sublime level is known as the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. Even if G-d’s fire has gone out within a person (G-d forbid), it can be rekindled through this level. (*pp. 169–70*)
8. Not every person, however, merits to reach this exalted level. We ask G-d for His assistance in doing so. (*p. 172*)

