



Soul Food – Pre Yom Kippur

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

When Hashem created Man, He joined together two different components to create a living being. He brought down an element of the Divine, the spiritual soul, and encased it in a physical body. Only when He breathed the Divine soul into the earthly body did Adam become a fully functioning being. We must continually ask ourselves, what is the dominant component of our being. Are we primarily physical, with some energy supplied by our soul so that we can move, talk, and eat? Or are we rather primarily spiritual, clothed in the garb of a body that necessitates our functioning along physical lines? Do we live to eat or do we eat to live?

This is the basis for the sentence in our *Yom Kippur* confession, “and for the sins that we have sinned before you with food and drink.” “Food and Drink” is a full category of sin, just as is each of the other transgressions we enumerate. Within this category are times we may have eaten non-kosher food, or been careless in checking our vegetables for bugs, or inadvertently sliced our meat with a dairy knife. This sin encompasses our attitude to food, and to our attitude to all the physical aspects of our lives. If we value food primarily for physical pleasure, we will remain forever unsatisfied. We will constantly look for things to fill a deep void within ourselves. But if we appreciate food as God’s gift to us, to sustain us on a spiritual journey in this physical realm, then our food and drink become elevated and take on a spiritual aura.

Our challenge is to recognize ourselves as primarily spiritual beings, to see our essence as a spark of the Divine. Every morning in our daily prayer we say, “My God, the soul that

You have implanted in me is pure.” If we internalize that message, we can successfully vanquish our evil inclination. The soul is essentially pure and cannot be tarnished. As a diamond that fell into a mud puddle, it may become sullied. But the dirt does not stick; it can be washed away to again reveal the diamond’s beauty. And the jewel case, my body, can be scrubbed clean. But only if we view our core as the spiritual battery that animates our external body.

If, on the other hand, we are more concerned with our temporal aspect, whether it is food and drink, or wealth, or honor, we will be unable to divest ourselves of our sins and our evil inclination. They will have become such an intrinsic part of us, that removing them will feel like cutting off a part of ourselves. Even when we feel we are doing *mitzvot*, we must be honest with ourselves and know whether we are acting for the sake of Heaven or for the sake of appearances for our friends and neighbors. The wrong motivation can take all the joy out of our performance, leaving us open to many punishments, for we would have subverted our service to Hashem to accommodate the false gods that are important in the physical world.

However, we do not need to compartmentalize our existence. In fact, we need to synthesize the two aspects of our being and elevate the physical to a spiritual purpose. Yes, we all need to eat. But when we eat, do we contemplate the miracle of vegetation that brought forth every aspect of our food supply? Do I appreciate that the apple I eat is a testimony to God’s love for me and His personal Providence over my pure *neshama*? Make the

blessing with these thoughts, and then thank Him for having eaten.

The very symmetry and beauty of our bodies can bring us closer to Hashem. As we ritually wash our hands before saying *hamotzie*, we physically represent the letters of the Name of God with our very bodies. After we’ve poured the water over our hands, we raise them up above our heads, creating the three-pronged letter “*shin*” with our head between our two hands. As we extend our hand to our fellow, the outstretched arm attached to our long body becomes the letter “*daled*”. And our ten fingers represent the “*yud*.” Our hands are so unique in that they are instrumental in performing so many of the *mitzvot* that we can actually symbolize God’s names through them.

When the Priests bless *Bnei Yisroel*, their hands face downward, as if pouring God’s blessings down on us. When we ritually wash our hands, we raise them upwards, making them receptacles to receive God’s blessings. When we awaken in the morning, let us focus on the many *mitzvot* our hands can do as extensions of our pure *neshamot*. Each *mitzvah* creates angels that accompany us wherever we go, both in this world and the next. When our *neshama* comes before Hashem on *Yom Kippur*, accompanied by the angels we created in the past year, we can feel more confident in asking Him for His help in washing the “soiled external clothing” our physical aspect tempted us to wear so that our spiritual essence can remain intact and retain its brilliance.



Mussar's Path For Life

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

The Torah tells us to walk in the ways of Hashem, "V'halachta b'drachav." The Gemara explains that this means we should emulate the *middot* of Hashem. In Micha, the *navi* says, "Mi kel komocha... melech ne'elem sovel elbon. Who is like Hashem who endures disgrace and embarrassment." Hashem endures the existence of man although he continues to sin and insult Him.

Rav Chaim Vital tells how the *magid* (angel) came to the Beis Yosef and said that if man would sense the profound pain that Hashem experiences from the sins man commits he would not be able to taste anything in his mouth. And although Hashem suffers so much He doesn't take revenge. Instead, He waits patiently for the sinner to do teshuva. Man too must attempt to emulate this attribute of patience, to endure people who are difficult,

and not take revenge. Rav Itzikel Blazer said about Reb Yisrael Salanter that if a person didn't treat him properly he would go out of his way to try to find something good to do for that person. Hashem does so much for us even when we don't deserve it. May we strive to do the same for others.

Opening the Gates of the Machzor: Maariv

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shoshie Nissenbaum

The Izhbitzer Rebbe notes that the prayer book of *Yom Tov* is called *machzor* as opposed to *siddur*. *Siddur* means organized, and the prayers in it are organized in a specific way. *Machzor* comes from the root word *hachzer*, to return. The words of the *machzor* return us to Hashem.

Tefilat Zaka is the introductory prayer said before the prayers of Yom Kippur commence. The Chofetz Chaim notes that it is very important to say the end of the tefilah where we declare forgiveness to everyone, except for those who owe us money which we can still retrieve. We confess to Hashem the sins we did with all the different parts of our body. Instead of using our body for good, we used it for evil. We ask Hashem to help us to use it in the future *l'shem shamayim* and as a *me'on l'Shechina* (dwelling place for the Divine Presence).

Kol Nidrei is one of the most significant prayers for which everyone should try to be present. We ask Hashem to release us of any promises that we didn't keep. There's a discussion amongst the *poskim* if it is a declaration from the present to the previous year or if it is a declaration for the coming year. The consensus is that it is for the coming year.

Throughout Yom Kippur we find threads of Rabbi Akiva's life woven into the *tefilot*. Yom Kippur is his *yartzeit*. We start the *Kol Nidrei* service with the verse, "Ohr zarua la'tzadik." We make a declaration to the entire

tion, "Light is sown for the righteous and for the upright the heart gladdens." All the *sifrei torah* are removed from the ark and brought around the *beit haknesset*. The last five word of *ohr zarua* spell out the name of Rabbi Akiva. At the end of his life Rabbi Akiva said *Shema Yisrael* with joy at finally being given the opportunity to fulfill the words of *b'chol nafshecha*, to sacrifice his soul for Hashem. The verse says *b'chol nafshecha* and not *b'chol gufo* (with one's whole body) which implies a self-sacrifice of one's spirituality for Hashem. All those who cannot go to shul on *Yom Kippur*, such as mothers of young children and those taking care of older people, are fulfilling *b'chol nafshecha*. Be like Rabbi Akiva and do it with joy.

Before beginning *Kol Nidrei* we say, "Al daat hamokom...anu matirim." We ask permission from Hashem and the congregation that we may pray with the transgressors. On *Yom Kippur* there's a place for every Jew to attain purification and forgiveness. Everybody is invited and included.

The tradition among the Ashkenazim is that we begin *Kol Nidrei* in a low tone and it slowly gets louder. At the start we cannot even open our mouth. Then our confidence increases. We know Hashem is waiting for us and wants to hear from us. As we say *Kol Nidrei* for the third time, we come before Hashem like a beloved son returning to his father.

After the *Vidui* confession we say *Selichot*. Rav Munk points out that we start with the letter *taf* and end with *aleph*. The message is

that what we think we know and understand we really don't. And therefore we must go back to the beginning. We tell Hashem, "I thought I knew what it meant to have a relationship with you, what trust meant, what loyalty was about. *Yaaleh tachnuneinu*, may my pleas rise up to You. Help me return. Teach me from *aleph*, just like Rabbi Akiva."

In between the *piyutim* we say the *Yud Gimmel Middot* starting with "Hashem, Hashem." "You are Hashem before the sin and after the sin. You are there to catch me and help me. Be there when I misuse my strengths and help me re-channel them in the right way."

"*Kel rachum v'chanun*." Hashem wants us to live. His goal is not to trick us. He does everything to help us come back to *teshuva*. "*Rachum*," He gives us another chance. He believes we can change. He knows we can if He gives us another opportunity for life. "*Chanun*," He gives even if we are undeserving. If someone finds himself overwhelmed with temptations and calls out to Hashem, He will help him. "*Erech apayim*," Hashem has patience. The Chazon Ish says the root of all sin is impulsivity. When we say this, we ask Hashem to teach us to be patient with ourselves and others. "*V'rav chesed*," Hashem extends His kindness to all those who lack personal merit. He rewards all our good deeds even if we sinned. "*Notzer chesed l'alafim*," the benefit of one *mitzvah* done with love extends to thousands of future generations.