



# Hakarat HaCheit

The first step in the *teshuva* process is *hakarat haCheit* (recognition of the sin). The natural state of the Jewish *neshama* is that it seeks to be close to G-d. It is considered an aberration for a person to desire to sin. Thus, *hakarat haCheit* stems from the sinner's feeling that he is distant from G-d. He wants to return because of the sense of loneliness he experiences.

The *pasuk* says, או הודע אליו חטאתו – אשר חטא – “If his sin that he committed becomes known to him” (Vayikra 4:23, 28), to teach that *yediat haCheit* (definite knowledge of the sin) is a necessary prerequisite to bringing a *Korban Chattat*. Tosafot<sup>1</sup> questions why the Torah had to specify that *yediat haCheit* is necessary prior to offering a *Korban Chattat*. This should have been understood from the fact that a *Korban Chattat* may not be offered voluntarily. This *korban* may only be offered for a *cheit* one knows he has committed, and so it should be obvious the sinner must know he sinned before bringing the *korban*.

Tosafot explains the *passuk* comes to exclude a case in which the individual merely suspects he may have sinned accidentally and therefore is *mafrish* (sets aside) an animal to be used as a potential *korban* once he ascertains he did, in fact, commit an *aveirah*. The *passuk* teaches that even if he subsequently comes to the realization he did sin, he would not be able to use that animal, because it was sanctified as a *korban* prior to definite knowledge that he sinned. The obligation to offer a *Korban Chattat* does not exist

prior to *yediat haCheit*, just as there is no *chiyuv teshuva* without *hakarat haCheit* and *yedi'at haCheit*.

Rabbeinu Yonah writes<sup>2</sup> that there is a special *mitzvah* of *teshuva* on Yom Kippur, beyond the constant obligation to repent every day. He bases himself on the *passuk*, לפני ה' תטהרו – “before Hashem shall you be cleansed” (Vayikra 16:30), which he understands as a directive to cleanse ourselves on this day. The Rav pointed out a similar statement of the Rambam (*Hilchot Teshuva* 2:7):

יום הכפורים הוא... קץ מחילה וסליחה לישׂראל. לפיכך חיבים הכל לעשות תשובה ולהתנדות ביום הכפורים.

“Yom Kippur is... a specific time of pardoning and forgiveness; therefore, all people are obligated to do *teshuva* and to confess their *aveirot* on Yom Kippur.”

Rav Soloveitchik suggested the nature of the obligation may be different on Yom Kippur than during the rest of the year, specifically in regard to the requirement of *yediat haCheit*. In general, if a person becomes aware of an *aveirah* he committed and thus has *yediat haCheit*, he has an obligation to do *teshuva*. The unique obligation on Yom Kippur is for one to search through all of his actions. In reviewing all his actions, including those he believed to be permissible in the past, he may well come to the realization he had been committing an *aveirah* all along that he did not recognize. He may find a *yediat haCheit* he was unaware of until this point, for which he is now able to do *teshuva*.

The Rav suggested a parallel *halacha* that illustrates this additional requirement. In discussing the destruction of *avodah zarah* specifically in Eretz Yisrael, the Torah commands:

אבד תאבדון את כל המקומות אשר עבדו-שם הגוים... את אלהיהם... ואבדתם את שמם מן המקום ההוא.

“You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations worshipped... their gods... and you shall obliterate their names from that place” (Devarim 12:2-3).

Based on this, the Rambam (*Hilchot Avodat Kochavim* 7:1) rules, בארץ ישׂראל מצוה לרדף אחריה עד שנאבד אותה מכל ארצנו, “In Eretz Yisrael, there is a *mitzvah* to chase after [*avodah zarah*] until we destroy it from our entire Land.” In *chutz laAretz*, no such requirement exists; the *chiyuv* only applies to *avodah zarah* we know about in an area we occupy. The additional *teshuva* obligation on Yom Kippur is thus similar to the increased obligation to destroy *avodah zarah* in Eretz Yisrael.<sup>3</sup>

Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Moadim.

1 Shavuot 4b, s.v. vene'elam; see Kovetz He'arot, Yevamot, 63:4.

2 Sha'arei Teshuva 4:17.

3 See MiPninei HaRav, 2001 ed., p. 320.

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