



GROWTH

At The SHABBAT TABLE

PARSHAT

HA'AZINU

A Tale of Two Worlds

On Yom Kippur, we recite a lengthy and detailed confession. Line after line, we enumerate sins — serious ones, painful ones, even ones that feel foreign to us. As we beat our chests and read the words of Vidui and Tachanun, many of us quietly wonder: Is this really me? Have I truly committed all of these transgressions? Isn't this a bit exaggerated?

To understand why Chazal placed such sweeping language into the heart of Yom Kippur, we need to take a step back and understand who we really are.

A human being is composed of two dimensions: the physical and the spiritual. The body is real, but it is not primary. Our essence is the neshama. The body is something we wear temporarily; the soul is who we truly are. We are not physical beings who occasionally experience spirituality. We are spiritual beings having a temporary physical experience.

The neshama originates beneath the Heavenly Throne. It pulls us toward goodness, toward meaning, toward growth — but that is only part of its role. Everything physical in this world has a spiritual counterpart. Chazal teach that angels and spiritual forces sustain every aspect of creation. Our actions, therefore, do not remain confined to this physical plane. Every mitzvah strengthens the spiritual worlds; every sin damages them. When Hashem warned Adam, "Do not destroy My world," He was teaching that sin does not merely violate a rule — it corrupts reality itself.

Our smallest actions are never small. A kind word, a moment of self-restraint, a sincere mitzvah can illuminate entire spiritual realms. Conversely, when a person sins, he creates spiritual impurity that reverberates through both the upper and lower worlds. The neshama is not merely a moral compass — it is a power source. When we perform mitzvot, the soul is elevated, energizing the spiritual worlds and drawing blessing into the physical one. When we sin, the soul is forced to generate destructive spiritual forces that weaken both realms.

This ongoing tension can be understood through a powerful metaphor. Consider Siamese twins: two distinct people, with two minds, sharing one body and one bloodstream. If one becomes intoxicated, both are affected. If that intoxication leads to reckless behavior, the innocent twin suffers alongside him. Naturally, the sober twin fights to regain control.

So it is with the body and the neshama. The body craves physical gratification. The soul longs for purpose, holiness, and eternity. Each seeks dominance. When the body "gets drunk" on materialism, the neshama resists — not because it wants to deny pleasure, but because it knows what we are capable of becoming.

This explains a deep psychological truth. Many people feel a quiet dissatisfaction in life, even amid comfort and success. That unease is the voice of the neshama, whispering, "You were meant for more." Some people heed that voice and rise. Others ignore it, and the inner conflict turns into sadness or emptiness. Still others fight it entirely, convincing themselves that honor, wealth, or status defines greatness — an internal battle that often manifests as arrogance.

With this perspective, the question we began with answers itself. If a person sees himself as merely physical, then the confessions of Yom Kippur feel exaggerated. But if we understand who we truly are — and the cosmic impact of our actions — then the words of Vidui are not overstated at all. They are sobering.

The first step of teshuvah is recognizing our own significance. Even the most self-important person vastly underestimates his true worth. The Torah regards our actions as monumental. When we observe Shabbat, we become partners with Hashem in Creation. When we perform a mitzvah properly, we sustain entire spiritual systems. If we truly grasped this, we would be awestruck; not crushed by guilt, but humbled by responsibility.

And so when we fail, it matters. Lashon hara is not "just words." Embarrassing someone is not "just a moment." These actions leave real spiritual damage. That is why we say the confessions and say, *These words apply to me* — not because I am evil, but because my actions are powerful.

Yet Yom Kippur is not a day of despair. Hashem created us to grow and desperately wants our success. Chazal teach that the reward for good outweighs punishment by hundreds of times. One sincere act — putting on tefillin with intention, giving tzedaka properly, truly speaking to Hashem in prayer — illuminates the upper worlds forever. That is why mitzvot have details. In this world, they may seem insignificant, but spiritually, precision channels light. When we perform a mitzvah correctly, we empower worlds beyond imagination.

On Yom Kippur, we are given the clarity to recognize this truth: our actions carry extraordinary weight. With that awareness, we can set meaningful goals for the year ahead — not out of fear, but out of purpose and love. We may never fully feel the gravity of our actions in this world, and that is okay. We only need to know that Hashem cherishes us deeply and believes in our potential.

May we all merit a *chatima tova*, a year of health, joy, and growth — and may we come to truly appreciate how significant we are in the eyes of Hashem, and live accordingly.