



A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Zevvy Goldish



It has only been a few weeks, and already *Succos* vacation is here. The *Rebbeim* keep telling us that this has just been the beginning; that after the *Chag* we'll get into the main part of the year. Then what was the point of the beginning? These first few weeks must be to set the stage for what we'll accomplish throughout the whole year. With the month of *Elul* culminating in the Ten Days of *Teshuva*, this whole month has been about starting fresh, and cleaning your slate to be ready for the rest of the year.

But what does it mean to have a clean slate? To be pure? These past few days I have done several things that are supposed to make one 'pure'. Saturday night I went to *Mea Shearim* and held a chicken by its wings over my head and then watched it be slaughtered. On *Erev Yom Kippur* I went to the *mikvah*, which is supposed to make someone 'ritually pure'. And the entire day of *Yom Kippur*, finishing with the most intense *Ne'ilah* I've ever experienced, overlooking *Har HaBayit*, was all about "*Kapara*". But what did all this 'purification' accomplish?

At the beginning of a chess game, all the pieces are reset, and the player gets a fresh start. But if this is not his first game, and he already has a record of wins and losses, then how is this game a new start? He can't change the fact that he lost X amount of games already. So too with sins: one cannot change the past and undo his sin. He can do *teshuva* and gain 'atonement' for his sins, but that doesn't change the fact that he committed certain actions. He can kill chickens and bathe as much as he wants, but it won't change the past. What then, does it change?

Too many people focus on getting 'atonement', or 'forgiveness' for their sins—they did something wrong and they don't want to get punished for it. What they don't realize is that sins are just as much a part of you as are *mitzvot*. They are both manifestations of your decisions, for better or worse; but the key is to learn *from both of them*. Purification means starting fresh, not by forgetting your sins, but by putting them aside, looking at your life, and deciding where you want to go now. Purification means beginning a new

game, and learning from the experience of your past games—your wins and your losses. Players become great because they focus on what they did right as well as what they did wrong.

The beginning is over, and the purification is complete. I now have two weeks to prepare myself to really grow this year. Two weeks to focus on all my experiences, and choose who I want to be, and what my goals are for this year. *B'Ezrat Hashem* I will be hiking from the Mediterranean Sea to the *Kineret* the last few days before we return to Yeshiva. In addition to doing *kaparot* with a chicken and going to the *mikveh*, I believe that this hike too will act as a source of purification. If my body can make it across all of Israel, certainly my soul can reach even greater heights.

It is my wish that everyone should find atonement for their sins; but not merely in begging to be spared of punishment, but in learning from their mistakes. People aren't punished *for* their sins, but rather *by* their sins. When a person truly regrets the bad decisions he has made, and becomes a person who wouldn't even want to sin in the first place, this is true *Teshuva*. May we all return to *Hashem* with happiness and make the most out of the coming *Chagim*.

Chag Sameach v' Gemar Chatima Tovah,

Zevvy Goldish