

## Timely Torah from Rabbi Sam Shor

### *Yom Kippur- Freedom from past guilt, celebration of future potential....*

There is a very peculiar statement in the early rabbinic treatise the *Zohar*. There our sages made this peculiar statement about the day of *Yom Kippur*.

*“Yom HaKippurim (The day of atonements) should rather be understood as Yom K’Purim-a day like Purim...”*

I have always been puzzled by this teaching. How are we to understand this strange statement?

*Yom Kippur* is of course, a twenty five hour communal fast day primarily spent in prayer and reflection and is generally perceived as the most solemn day of the Jewish calendar. How then are we to understand this rabbinic statement comparing *Yom Kippur* with *Purim*, perhaps the most joyous and rambunctious day of the Jewish year?

I recently read a beautiful story attributed to the great Chasidic Master, Reb Leibele Eiger (as cited by Rabbi Shlomo Aviner in his anthology of discourses delivered by Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, zt”l).

Each and every *Yom Kippur* evening, the community would gather at the onset of the fast and would wait for hours, until nearly midnight, until Reb Leibele would finally arrive to lead the community in the *Kol Nidrei* prayer. For the entire five hours that the community waited for Reb Leibele Eiger, hundreds of people joined hands and voices in song and dance!

‘And what song were they singing?’ Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook asked, then answered:

*“Shoshanat Yakov Tzahala V’Samecha- The rose of Jacob was cheerful and glad!”*

How are we to comprehend this story of Reb Leibele Eiger and his Chasidim singing and dancing for hours on *Kol Nidrei* night? Why of all songs did the Chasidim recite the liturgical poem of *Shoshanat Yakov*, which is traditionally sung on *Purim*?

Rabbi Yakov Moshe Charlap zt”l, in his work *Mei Marom*, offered a beautiful explanation of the liturgical poem of *Shoshanat Yakov*.

Rav Charlap asks the question:

“What does it mean that the Jewish People are referred to as *Shoshanat Yakov*-the rose of Jacob?”

Rav Charlap offered the following profound insight to answer this very question:

A rose is a beautiful fragrant flower! But a rose only achieves its bloom and maintains its fragrance and beauty because it is connected to its stem! Without its stem, a rose simply wilts and dies! It is the stem which gives it life, allows it to bloom! And what is unique to the stem of a rose? Staggered and spread across the stem are many thorns!!!

Now we can understand why the Jewish People are called the rose of Jacob! The Jewish people gain strength from the many difficult, painful episodes in our history. When we reflect on these thorny moments of pain, mistakes and even guilt, and gain perspective and overcome these difficult episodes, we begin to be transformed, to grow more confident, to “blossom” and reach our full potential!

Perhaps, Rav Charlap’s insights can now assist us in understanding our teaching from the Zohar as well. Why did our sages liken Yom Kippur to Purim? Perhaps Yom Kippur, as the conclusion of the ten day period of communal reflection and growth actually *celebrates* that culmination. On Rosh Hashana, and indeed throughout the entire ten days of awe we express our guilt, remorse and regret for any mistakes and pain we may have caused to others through our actions. Perhaps what our Sages and ultimately Reb Leibele Eiger and Rav Charlap can teach us about the nature of Yom Kippur, is that Yom Kippur is actually our opportunity to let go of the many thorns- of the guilt and pain, and take the perspective gained through these experiences and begin to bloom into the fragrance of potential and achievement!

May this Yom Kippur offer each and every one of us great clarity, transformation and growth, and the inspiration to truly blossom in the coming year...

Gmar Chatima Tova....Rabbi Sam Shor