

Are You Ready for the Final Exam

From the holiness of Yom Kippur to the choices of an ordinary day

Developed and Presented by Rabbi Yossi Michalowicz

This speaker's edition contains two connected classes. Part One carries the holiness of Yom Kippur into the changing hours of ordinary life. Part Two asks how those hours prepare a person for the final examination. The two-sided handout accompanies both classes.

Part One The Holiness of the Hour

The Last Minutes of Yom Kippur

We are sitting now in a very unusual place in the calendar. Mincha has ended, Maariv is approaching, and Motzaei Yom Kippur is no longer an idea. It is coming toward us. In a short while, the fast will end. We will put away the machzor, eat, return home, and reenter the world of telephones, dishes, schedules, unfinished conversations, and ordinary decisions.

That creates one of the central problems of Yom Kippur. We know how to rise. The day itself lifts us. We fast, refrain from ordinary physical life, spend hours in shul, confess, and stand before Hashem almost like malachim. But what happens when the day releases us? What becomes of the holiness when the hour changes?

The question is not whether Yom Kippur was sincere. The question is whether its truth can survive supper. Can the person who said Al Cheit speak differently at home? Can the person who accepted Hashem's Kingship use money differently on Tuesday? Can the person who felt close to Hashem remain close when the next hour does not look holy?

The second-last chapter of Are You Only Human is based on the final chapter of Tomer Devorah. The Ramak closes his sefer by giving us a map of an ordinary day. He does not end with an abstract definition of holiness. He takes us through sleep, waking, Torah, Shacharis, work, food, Mincha, renewed Torah, Maariv, and Krias Shema al hamittah. His closing question is practical: **Which Divine quality governs this hour, and what does this hour require from me?**

Holiness Does Not Always Look the Same

Many people unconsciously define spiritual consistency as sameness. If learning is holy, then more learning must always be the answer. If Chesed is holy, then giving must always be the answer. If firmness was necessary yesterday, then firmness must still be necessary today. We imagine that a holy person has discovered one elevated mode and remains there.

The Ramak teaches something subtler. Hashem's service changes as the hour changes. The morning may require Chesed. Mincha may require Gevurah. Torah may require Tiferes. Night may require Malchus. The allegiance remains steady, but its expression changes. A person can leave one holy activity for another without leaving holiness at all.

That is why this chapter is the correct beginning for a class delivered between Mincha and Maariv. We are physically standing at one of the transitions the Ramak describes. Mincha belongs to the declining day and to the disciplined strength of Gevurah. After Mincha, Torah restores Tiferes so that firmness does not harden into severity. Then evening arrives, and the person returns through Maariv to Malchus, accepting that the King governs the outcomes he cannot control.

Constant holiness does not mean that every hour looks the same. It means that no hour is left empty of its proper avodah.

The Ramaks Map of the Day

Let us walk through the map slowly. The chart on the reverse side of the handout gathers the entire route. Keep one question in mind as we move from row to row: What would it mean to meet Hashem through the truth of this particular hour?

How to Use the Chart During This Talk

Turn the handout to The Holiness of the Hour now, but do not try to study every cell at once. First read only the two boxes across the top: break the fast with Chesed, and begin moving from Yom Kippur toward Sukkos. Then let your eyes travel quickly down the first column so you can see the itinerary of the coming day. That first glance should take less than a minute.

Leave the chart open. As we reach each station in the lecture, move to that row and read it from left to right: the hour, its sefirah, the avodah, the Hod handoff, and one ordinary-life answer. In that way the chart accompanies the teaching; it is not a second presentation that must be repeated afterward.

At the end, we will not go through all the rows again. We will return only to the two lines beneath the table and use the chart for a decision: circle one station that needs strengthening, and identify one good mode that must be released when its hour has ended. So the sequence is: preview the route once, travel through it row by row, and conclude with one personal choice.

Motzaei Yom Kippur: Breaking the Fast as Chesed

Begin with the first box at the top of the chart. Before we enter the regular daily cycle, tonight gives us a special opening sequence. We will leave shul and go home to break the fast. That meal is not an interruption of the avodah. After a day in which we have denied the body, the first task is to care for the body Hashem entrusted to us. We make a brachah, eat and drink calmly, notice the people around the table, and help those who are tired or weak. This is Chesed: nourishment without indulgence, gratitude without hurry, and concern that nobody else has to struggle alone.

The test begins precisely here. It is possible to spend an entire day like a malach and then become impatient over the first cup of water or the first plate of food. The fast is not completed only by waiting for the clock. It is completed by the kind of human being who returns to physical life. We do not fall out of holiness when we eat. We carry holiness into eating by receiving the body's need as a responsibility rather than allowing appetite to become the master.

From One Mitzvah to the Next

The Rema writes that those who are careful in mitzvot begin making the sukkah immediately on Motzaei Yom Kippur, in order to go from one mitzvah to another. The point is not that everyone must complete a construction project tonight. The point is that Yom Kippur should hand us directly to the next command. Teshuvah must become movement.

If you can physically begin the sukkah, do one real act: bring out a board, place a panel, measure the space, gather the tools, or inspect what must be repaired. If building tonight is not practical, make the transition concrete in another honest way: take out the sukkah materials, set the time when the work will begin, arrange for the person whose help is needed, review the relevant halachos, or begin learning about Sukkos. Preparation and learning are not literally the construction itself, but they prevent the next mitzvah from remaining a vague good intention.

So the first three stations after shul are simple: break the fast with Chesed; make one concrete movement toward Sukkos; then end the night under Malchus. Do not turn

the spiritual energy of Motzaei Yom Kippur into an exhausting night that damages tomorrow. A responsible bedtime is part of the handoff.

Night and Bedtime Malchus

Now move from the two Motzaei Yom Kippur boxes into the first row of the main table. The Jewish day begins at night. The first avodah is therefore not achievement but acceptance. At bedtime, a person recites Krias Shema, accepts the yoke of Heaven, and surrenders the unfinished day. Going to sleep at a responsible time can itself become Malchus. I acknowledge that I am not sovereign, that my body has limits, and that tomorrow's avodah requires tonight's restraint.

There is a spiritual temptation to keep going because the present activity feels important. The work is unfinished. The email should be answered. The sefer is open. Yet even a good activity can become distorted when it refuses to end. Malchus asks us to close the day under the Kingship of Hashem rather than under the tyranny of our own momentum.

Waking and Torah Tiferes

The Ramak speaks of rising at chatzos, cleansing the hands, and joining the Shechinah through Torah. Most people in this room may not be ready to adopt a full chatzos practice. But we should not lose the direction because the highest form is presently beyond us. The accessible question is whether Torah can speak before the demands of the day become deafening. Can I rise a little earlier and allow fifteen minutes of serious learning to shape the person who will enter Shacharis?

Tiferes is usually translated as beauty, but here beauty means the harmony of different powers placed in their correct relationship. Chesed moves outward: give, welcome, expand. Gevurah draws a line: stop, protect, restrain. A human being needs both. Unlimited Chesed can overwhelm or control; unsoftened Gevurah can become cold and punitive. Tiferes does not simply split the difference. It listens to both and asks what emes requires now.

That is why Tiferes is identified with Yaakov, the middah of truth, and why Torah is its guide. My instinct cannot reliably decide how much kindness or how much restraint is correct when my own pride, fear, or appetite is involved. Torah supplies the measure. It tells Chesed where giving is faithful, tells Gevurah where a boundary is necessary, and brings them together in service of something higher than either impulse alone.

Morning Torah therefore does more than provide information. It gathers the scattered parts of the self and places them beneath that larger truth. The goal is not to consume words quickly. It is to permit Torah to decide which quality should lead today, which quality must support it, and what kind of person should wake up inside this day.

Entering Shul and the Three Avos

Find the row marked Entering shul. When entering, the Ramak describes binding oneself to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov: Chesed, Gevurah, and Tiferes. This means that we should not cross the threshold casually. The entrance itself should gather love, awe, and truth before the first formal paragraph of davening begins.

We begin with **Mah tovu ohalecha Yaakov, mishkenosecha Yisrael**: How good are your tents, Yaakov; your dwelling places, Yisrael. These were words of blessing placed in Bilaam's mouth when he had intended to curse. Chazal also hear in the tents and dwelling places the sanctuaries of Jewish life: homes of modesty, Torah, and prayer. We are not merely saying that the building looks beautiful. We are saying: How good is a Jewish space when its arrangement protects dignity and allows the Shechinah to dwell there.

The two names are also meaningful for the person entering. Yaakov is the Jew carrying the struggles and pressures of ordinary life. Yisrael is that same person standing more openly before Hashem. We do not wait to become Yisrael before entering shul. We bring Yaakov through the door so that the ordinary tent can be lifted into a dwelling place of kedushah.

Then comes the verse that the Ramak specifically explains: **Va'ani b'rov chasdecha avo veisecha; eshtachaveh el heichal kodshecha b'yirasecha**. As for me, through Your abundant kindness I will enter Your house; I will bow toward Your holy Sanctuary in awe of You. The first lesson is humility. I do not enter because I have earned an audience. I enter through Your abundant Chesed.

The Ramak finds all three Avos inside this verse. **B'rov chasdecha**, through Your abundant kindness, is Avraham and Chesed. **Eshtachaveh el heichal kodshecha**, I will bow toward Your holy Sanctuary, is Yitzchak: the body bends, self-importance yields, and Gevurah teaches reverence before holiness. **B'yirasecha**, in awe of You, is Yaakov, who said at Beis El, **Mah nora hamakom hazeh** - how awesome is this place. Yaakov's Tiferes holds love and awe together in one truthful act of entering.

The Ramak adds that the entrance now contains thought, speech, and action. The thought is the intention to bind oneself to the Avos. The speech is the verse said at the doorway. The action is entering and bowing. Nothing remains abstract: mind, mouth, and body all cross the threshold together.

During COVID, we worked to make saying Mah Tov upon entering shul a real communal practice. It has gradually fallen into disuse. This is a worthy practice to restore. One need not make a ceremony or delay anyone else. Stop for a few seconds, look into the shul, say Mah Tov and Va'ani b'rov chasdecha with awareness, and allow those words to change the way you enter. The first act of tefillah is to realize where you have arrived, why you have been permitted to enter, and before Whom you are about to stand.

Prayer Yesod Flowing into Malchus

The Ramak then describes Yesod flowing into Malchus. Those words can sound remote if we do not define them. Yesod means foundation, connection, and channel. It gathers what came before it and carries those inner qualities toward expression. Malchus is Kingship, but it is also the receiving and expressive level at which what was hidden becomes present in the world. In the language of tefillah, Malchus is closely connected with speech: actual words spoken before the King.

The flow from Yesod into Malchus therefore means that love, awe, gratitude, need, Torah, and teshuvah must not remain vague feelings inside me. Yesod gathers them and gives them a faithful channel; Malchus gives them a voice and places them before Hashem. The word flow does not ask us to imagine a mysterious liquid. It describes influence moving through a connection until an inner truth becomes an expressed relationship.

If I have deep feelings but never bring them into words, the inner avodah has not yet fully entered Malchus. If I pronounce all the words while the heart is absent, Malchus has speech but the channel is empty. Tefillah tries to join the two: the heart supplies content, Yesod carries it, the mouth gives it form, and Malchus recognizes that these words are being addressed to the King. **Prayer is the movement from inner awareness to faithful speech before Hashem.**

Shacharis Chesed

Shacharis is the prayer of Avraham and the opening Chesed of the day. Morning asks: What can I give? What energy, attention, patience, money, encouragement, or practical help must leave my private possession and become life for someone else?

This does not mean that every morning requires a dramatic act. A person may give a calm tone to a spouse, attention to a child, dignity to an employee, or a telephone call to someone who is alone. Chesed is not measured only by the size of the gesture. It is measured by whether another person's need became real to me.

The Daytime Torah Tiferes

The middle of the day is governed by Tiferes through Torah. Tiferes does not merely mean that Torah is beautiful. It is the beauty created when different powers are held in truthful proportion. It stands on the middle line: Chesed wants to expand and give; Gevurah wants to limit and protect; Tiferes asks what the truth of this person, this obligation, and this moment actually requires. Its beauty is harmony without falsifying either side.

That is why Torah belongs here. Torah supplies the measure by which Chesed and Gevurah can be integrated. Not every gift is helpful. Not every boundary is honest. Torah prevents generosity from becoming control and restraint from becoming revenge. Tiferes is therefore not compromise for its own sake, and it is not simply being nice. It is disciplined compassion: the right middah, in the right measure, for the sake of truth.

Imagine that someone asks for help. Chesed immediately says yes; Gevurah asks what the request will cost, whether it is healthy, and whether the responsibility properly belongs to me. Tiferes does not answer by giving exactly half. Sometimes truth requires a wholehearted yes. Sometimes it requires a clear no. Sometimes it requires help with limits. The beauty lies in each power occupying its proper place, as different notes become music only when they are ordered around one composition.

A useful daytime question is: What Torah truth must govern the next transaction or conversation? Perhaps I know the halachah of honest business, but the customer is standing before me now. Perhaps I believe every person is created b'tzelem Elokim, but the person irritating me has now entered the room. Tiferes takes truth out of the sefer and brings it into proportionate conduct.

Every Meal as Chesed for the Body

This station does not refer to one meal alone. Breakfast, lunch, supper, the Motzaei Yom Kippur break-fast, and even a necessary drink or snack can each become an expression of Chesed. The body does not need care only once a day. At every meal we

can ask: What does the body entrusted to me genuinely need now, how much does it need, and how will this food enable the next part of my avodah?

The Midrash in Vayikra Rabbah introduces Hillel's teaching with the verse, **Gomel nafsho ish chesed** - a person of Chesed does good to his own soul. When Hillel left his students, they asked where he was going. He answered that he was going to perform an act of kindness for the guest in his house. They wondered: Do you have a guest every day? Hillel replied that the soul is a guest within the body; it is here today and may be gone tomorrow. Caring properly for that guest is Chesed.

The Midrash gives another form of the same lesson. Hillel said he was going to the bathhouse to perform a mitzvah. If attendants clean the statues of earthly kings, he explained, how much more must a human being, created b'tzelem Elokim, care for the body bearing that Divine image. Hillel was not making comfort the highest value. He was rejecting the idea that neglect of the body is automatically spiritual.

A meal therefore becomes Chesed when it nourishes rather than merely gratifies. Chesed offers the body what it needs; Gevurah supplies measure and says when enough is enough; Tiferes asks what kind of eating truthfully serves this person and this day. The activity may look less holy than Torah study, but the governing avodah has changed. **Holiness is not proved by making every activity look like learning. It is proved by serving Hashem through the truth of the activity now required.**

Mincha Gevurah

Then the day begins to decline. Mincha is associated with Yitzchak and Gevurah. The person who has been giving, working, speaking, purchasing, solving, and controlling must stop. The telephone may still be ringing. The task may be unfinished. The ego insists that this particular activity cannot be interrupted.

Mincha creates a boundary inside the day. Gevurah is the strength to say enough: enough work, enough appetite, enough reaction, enough of the fantasy that everything depends upon me. The prayer interrupts momentum and reveals whether the day belongs to Hashem or merely contains occasional thoughts about Him.

We have just davened Mincha. So we should ask the question while the experience is still near: What did Mincha interrupt today? Was it only a schedule, or did it interrupt the illusion of control? What impulse needs the same boundary after we leave this room?

After Mincha Return to Torah

A boundary can be correct and still leave a residue. After saying no, a person may enjoy the hardness of the no. After making a judgment, he may carry the emotional severity into the next relationship. Rabbi Tschingel's commentary explains the Ramak's movement after Mincha as a return to Torah, a return to Tiferes. This does not erase Gevurah. Tiferes keeps the necessary boundary and restores it to its proper proportion, so that strength serves truth and compassion rather than the ego's pleasure in being severe.

That return can be literal: a mishnah, a halachah, a few lines of Gemara, or a carefully studied paragraph. If circumstances prevent learning at that moment, the Torah already learned must still govern the next act. Silence may be wise, but Torah must prevent silence from becoming contempt. A refusal may be necessary, but Torah must prevent refusal from becoming punishment.

This is exactly what we are doing now between Mincha and Maariv. We are not filling time until the next minyan. We are allowing Torah to change the emotional texture of Gevurah before we enter the night.

Maariv Malchus

The Ramak writes that after one has risen for Mincha and become bound to Gevurah, one waits until evening, when Tiferes descends toward Malchus. The waiting matters. The Ramak presents three appointments with Hashem, each with its own spiritual identity. This is not a halachic attack upon every legitimate circumstance in which Mincha and Maariv are combined. It is the spiritual ideal that the new hour should be allowed to ask its new question.

At Maariv, the person returns to Malchus. After a day of choices, plans, and effort, he acknowledges that outcomes belong to Hashem. He does not abandon responsibility. He releases ownership. He can preserve the next faithful action without demanding control over the final result.

That may be the deepest preparation for Motzaei Yom Kippur. We have worked intensely today. We confessed, prayed, fasted, and tried to return. Soon we must leave the verdict and the future with Hashem. Malchus asks us to carry responsibility without pretending to be the King.

Where Are Netzach and Hod

At this point, an attentive student should ask a question. The Ramak has named Malchus, Tiferes, Chesed, Gevurah, and Yesod within the clock of the day. Where are Netzach and Hod? The base text does not assign them separate hours, and we should not pretend that it does.

The Ramak's broader teaching gives us a responsible way to understand their presence. Netzach and Hod are compared to the two legs. They carry the upper middos into movement. They may not introduce a new destination at every hour; they enable the person to travel faithfully from one demand to the next.

Netzach Carries the Allegiance

Netzach becomes visible when the person begins again tomorrow. One inspiring Yom Kippur can produce a powerful resolution. Netzach asks what remains on an ordinary Wednesday when the music has stopped, the white clothing has been put away, and no one is watching. The sefirah does not require an unbroken record. It requires return.

A missed station is not permission to abandon the route. If Shacharis was rushed, daytime Torah can still restore Tiferes. If the morning collapsed, Mincha can still become a real Gevurah. If Mincha was poor, Maariv can still become Malchus.

Continuity is built by returning, not by never having missed.

Hod Allows the Handoff

Hod is acknowledgment, humility, and the willingness to yield. Its place in this map is the handoff. It admits that the strength appropriate to the previous hour was given by Hashem for that hour. It was never my private identity, and I am not entitled to impose it upon the hour that follows.

This is harder than it sounds because the previous mode may have been genuinely holy. A person may resist Mincha because he is performing valuable work. He may resist sleep because he is learning. He may carry the firmness of a necessary boundary into an evening that now requires tenderness. The yetzer hara can preserve a good middah past its proper time until yesterday's avodah becomes today's distortion.

Think of the two legs. One bears the weight while the other releases and moves forward; then they exchange roles. If both legs insist upon remaining fixed, the person may be stable, but he cannot travel. Netzach says, Do not abandon the

destination when the form changes. Hod says, Do not confuse the form you used a moment ago with the destination itself.

Netzach preserves the allegiance. Hod permits the form of that allegiance to change. Together they create faithful flexibility.

The Hod Question at Each Transition

At bedtime, Hod releases productivity and allows Malchus to receive. At waking, Hod releases the comfort of sleep so that Torah can speak. At Shacharis, even preferred learning yields to prayer. During the day, generosity yields to Torah's judgment of what is truly helpful. At Mincha, momentum bows to Gevurah. After Mincha, firmness yields again to Tiferes. At Maariv, control yields to Malchus.

The practical Hod question is therefore not only, What should I do now? It is also, **What good mode am I reluctant to release?** The answer may be giving, learning, correcting, planning, working, speaking, or controlling. Hod honors the previous avodah by allowing it to end when its appointed work is complete.

A Worthy Goal from Kesser to Malchus

The daily clock tells us which quality governs the changing hours. The sefiros also give us a second map: how a worthy purpose moves from hidden will into visible action. This is a synthesis developed through the book, not a sequence explicitly stated by the Ramak in Chapter Ten.

Kesser asks what I truly want and why that desire deserves to govern me. Chochmah identifies the central insight. Binah develops the plan and its consequences. Chesed invests energy and resources. Gevurah sets boundaries and priorities. Tiferes integrates generosity with truth. Netzach prepares for resistance. Hod receives correction and revises without surrendering the goal. Yesod creates the channel - a habit, relationship, schedule, or covenant. Malchus asks what will actually be done, by whom, and when.

People often attempt teshuvah only at the level of Malchus. They announce a decision, make a rule, send a message, or begin an activity. Sometimes immediate action is necessary. But durable change usually requires the hidden work above it. A resolution without Kesser has no governing reason. A plan without Gevurah has no protection. A promise without Yesod has no channel. A noble intention without Malchus never enters the world.

The question after Yom Kippur is therefore not, How many resolutions can I make tonight? Choose one worthy ratzon. Let it travel. Ask what insight, plan, investment, boundary, balance, persistence, humility, channel, and concrete deed it requires.

The Map Is Not All or Nothing

A person can turn this beautiful map into a perfectionist trap. I did not rise at chatzos, so the sequence has already failed. I lost my temper at breakfast, so the day is gone. I did not live up to Yom Kippur, so the inspiration was false. That conclusion reverses the purpose of the map.

Every governing hour offers a new point of entry. A missed hour may require honest teshuvah and practical repair, but it does not cancel the avodah now standing before us. The correct question is not, Did I preserve a flawless day? It is, Which sefirah governs now, and what faithful act remains possible in this hour?

Missing one station does not cancel the journey. Return to Hashem at the next hour.

One Day Under the Governing Light

Let us now turn the map into one integrated avodah. This is not a demand to redesign an entire life tonight. Choose one goal that is honest, safe, and concrete enough to enter action. It may concern prayer, Torah, health, money, a relationship, speech, patience, or a responsibility that has been repeatedly postponed. Then carry that one ratzon through the changing lights of the next day.

The exercise matters because a Yom Kippur resolution often fails in one of two ways. Sometimes it remains too high. We say, I will become more patient, spiritual, generous, or disciplined, but the resolution never acquires a first visible act. At other times, we choose an act without discovering the will that should govern it. We begin a routine that has no deep reason and therefore collapses as soon as it becomes inconvenient. The sefiros join the height of Kesser to the concreteness of Malchus.

Motzaei Yom Kippur Kesser and Malchus

After Maariv and the breaking of the fast, write two sentences. The first is My Kesser: What do I truly want, and why is it worthy of governing me? Do not write a slogan. Name the human and spiritual good you are seeking. I want to learn more is vague. I want Torah to possess a protected place in my week because I do not want my mind to be shaped only by work and news is a governing ratzon.

The second sentence is My Malchus: What is the first concrete action? If the goal concerns Torah, the act may be putting one appointment into the calendar and choosing the sefer. If it concerns a relationship, it may be one apology, one conversation scheduled at a calm time, or one form of pressure that will stop. If it concerns money, it may be one disclosure, one budget line, or one question brought to a rav or accountant.

Kesser and Malchus belong together here. Kesser prevents the action from becoming mechanical. Malchus prevents the will from remaining imaginary. Then choose a bedtime that protects the next morning. Before sleep, say Krias Shema with the intention that the goal belongs beneath Hashem's Kingship. You are responsible for the next act, but you are not promised control over the result.

Before Shacharis Let Torah Speak

Rise somewhat earlier than the day's necessities demand and learn before davening. The amount should be realistic. Fifteen faithful minutes are more useful than a heroic schedule that survives for two mornings. Choose Torah that can be understood carefully, not pages merely consumed so that a box can be checked.

Bring the goal into the learning without forcing every text to speak about it. Ask instead: What does Torah say about the kind of person who can carry this goal? A plan to repair a relationship may need halachos of speech, but it may first need a Torah understanding of kavod habriyos, anger, responsibility, or forgiveness. A plan for health may need the truth that the body is entrusted to us. Tiferes gives the ratzon a truthful shape.

Shacharis Ask What Must Be Given

At Shacharis, enter the morning through Chesed. Every worthy goal requires an investment. What must be given for this to live? The answer may be time, attention, money, patience, transportation, encouragement, or the willingness to be inconvenienced. A goal that costs nothing often changes nothing.

Be careful, however, not to confuse giving with controlling. If the goal concerns another person, Chesed asks what that person actually needs, not what allows the giver to feel generous or secure. Sometimes the gift is assistance. Sometimes the gift is patience, privacy, or room. A Chesed that demands emotional payment is no longer centered upon the recipient's need.

During the Day See the Whole Picture

During the day, let Tiferes keep us from telling a one-sided story. A relationship may contain real love and real injury. A person may have made genuine progress and still owe repair. A new practice may be valuable and still need adjustment. Tiferes holds the different truths together and asks Torah what each one requires from us now.

At the meal, practice Chesed toward the embodied soul. Eat in a way that equips rather than numbs. If the goal concerns health, the meal itself may be the central act. If the goal concerns Torah or family, the meal still matters because exhaustion and hunger change the person who will attempt those duties. Spiritual plans fail when they imagine that the body is not part of the human being who must carry them.

Mincha Name the Necessary Boundary

At Mincha, ask what must be restrained, limited, refused, protected, or stopped. Every worthy goal needs Gevurah. A commitment to Torah may require a boundary around a telephone. A commitment to honesty may require refusing an attractive shortcut. A commitment to peace may require ending a conversation before anger takes command. A commitment to Chesed may require a limit that prevents help from turning into unhealthy dependence.

Choose one boundary and observe it that afternoon. Do not leave Gevurah at the level of admiration. Let the interruption of Mincha become evidence that momentum is not sovereign. If you cannot stop for Hashem when the clock says Mincha, it will be difficult to stop for the goal when appetite, fear, or ego says continue.

After Mincha Return the Boundary to Torah

After Mincha, learn even briefly whenever possible. Then ask how that Torah should govern the tone of the boundary. The act of stopping may have been correct, but the person who stopped may still be angry, triumphant, frightened, or self-righteous. Tiferes does not erase the boundary. It removes the ego that attached itself to the boundary.

Suppose a parent correctly refuses a child's unreasonable demand. The refusal may be Gevurah, while the coldness that follows is not. Suppose an employer must correct an employee. The correction may be necessary, while public humiliation is not. Suppose a person turns down another request for help because his family needs him. The boundary may be holy, while the resentment expressed in saying no may still require teshuvah. Returning to Torah asks the boundary to become true in content and in form.

Maariv Release the Outcome

At Maariv, identify what became concrete and what remains outside your control. Malchus is not passivity. You may need another action tomorrow. But this hour asks you to release ownership of the other person's response, the speed of visible progress, and the fantasy that a worthy deed guarantees the outcome you prefer.

Accepting Hashem's Kingship protects the goal from two opposite dangers. Success can produce arrogance: I repaired this. Failure can produce despair: Nothing I do matters. Malchus answers both. The act was entrusted to me; the kingdom was not. I will preserve tomorrow's faithful step and return the verdict to the King.

If a Station Was Missed

If one station was missed, do not discard the avodah. Name the failure without euphemism. Make whatever correction is required. Then resume with the sefirah governing now. This is not lowering the standard. It is refusing to let one failure appoint itself king over the rest of the day.

A person who missed the morning learning should not use guilt to avoid Mincha. A person who broke the boundary should not use shame to avoid Maariv. A person who spoke badly should apologize and then continue. Netzach returns. Hod releases the image of the perfect day. Malchus performs the next deed.

How to Use the Reverse Side Tonight

We have already traveled through the chart row by row, so we will not teach it a second time. Now use it for one decision. Circle one row that repeatedly disappears from your day. Perhaps morning Chesed is strong but Mincha Gevurah is weak. Perhaps you set boundaries well but never return after Mincha to Tiferes, so necessary firmness follows you home. Perhaps you work responsibly all day but Maariv never becomes a real surrender, and you carry every outcome into bed.

Then underline one transition at which Hod is difficult. What good mode are you reluctant to release? Some people cannot release productivity. Some cannot release the role of rescuer. Some cannot stop correcting. Some cannot allow yesterday's disappointment to yield to today's possibility. The chart is most useful when it identifies the handoff at which a good quality has begun to overstay its hour.

Finally, place a small mark beside the point at which Netzach will be tested tomorrow. The test is usually not the first performance. It is the return after tiredness, interruption, embarrassment, or partial failure. Decide now what

returning will look like. The smaller and more definite the next step, the less opportunity the yetzer hara has to replace teshuvah with drama.

This entire exercise can be summarized in four questions: What does this hour ask? What previous mode must I release? What allegiance must continue? What act will make the answer visible? Those questions carry the Ramak's final chapter out of the sefer and into the hours beginning tonight.

The Tzlach and the Life Within the Path

The chapter closes with a teaching of the Tzlach on Rabbi Eliezer's final instructions. Rabbi Eliezer's students asked him, Teach us paths of life through which we may merit Olam Haba. The Tzlach listens to one apparently unnecessary word: bahem - within them. They did not ask only which road eventually leads to Olam Haba. They asked how the life of Olam Haba can be experienced within the road itself.

The Tzlach explains that the deepest delight of Olam Haba is closeness to Hashem. Yet in Olam Haba, one can no longer perform another mitzvah, overcome another impulse, or choose another act of faithfulness. This world contains a unique possibility: the mitzvah itself and the closeness created through it can exist together.

One hour of teshuvah and good deeds in this world is therefore finer, in this respect, than all the life of Olam Haba. Olam Haba contains the radiance of the destination. This world contains the privilege of taking the next step toward Hashem.

The point of the Ramak's schedule is not to collect spiritual marks. It is to meet Hashem within the path required now. Going to sleep on time can contain the deveikus of Malchus. Giving at Shacharis can contain the deveikus of Chesed. Stopping at Mincha can contain the deveikus of Gevurah. Releasing control at Maariv can contain the deveikus of Malchus.

Do not wait until the end of the road to live with Hashem. Meet Him within the path required now.

The Bridge to the Final Exam

We are now ready for the final chapter of the book. The Tzlach has taught us that the decisive opportunity exists here, inside the next human act. The Ramak has taught us that every hour brings a different form of that opportunity. The final chapter asks how Heaven evaluates the life formed by all those hours.

The Final Exam is not postponed until the end of life. The questions arrive now: in a financial choice, an interruption, a relationship, a tired evening, a truth we resist, a person who needs dignity, and a morning in which we must decide who wears the crown.

So before we open the examination paper, look once more at the daily map. Yom Kippur will end. The examination will not. The next hour will hand us another question, and the answer will have to be given in the form of a life.

Part Two The Final Exam

The Examination We Are Allowed to See

Do you remember when you were in high school or university and the teacher announced that there was going to be a comprehensive examination? Almost immediately, someone would raise a hand and ask, 'Is this question going to be on the test?'

Why did we ask that? Because we wanted to know what we had to study. The course might contain many interesting ideas, but when the examination approached, we wanted to know what would actually be tested. And if we could somehow have obtained a copy of the examination in advance, we might even have been tempted to look at it. That would not have been ethical, of course, but the temptation is understandable. If we knew the questions, we would know exactly how to prepare.

Well, there is one comprehensive examination whose questions have already been published. It is the examination that awaits every human being when we leave this world and stand before the Heavenly Court. Hashem will ask us ten fundamental questions, and we are permitted to see the examination paper now.

What do you think will be on it? If we were writing the examination, we would probably ask: Did you keep Shabbos? Did you observe kashrus? Did you daven properly? Were you careful about lashon hara? Did you give tzedakah? Did you believe in Hashem during difficult times? Those are all indispensable parts of Jewish life. Yet the questions Chazal record are not quite the list most of us would have written.

The first question is especially surprising. Business honesty appears before fixed Torah study. We are asked whether we hoped for redemption. We are asked whether we built a future beyond ourselves. Three questions concern not simply whether Torah was somewhere in our lives, but whether Torah possessed our time, developed our minds and taught us how to think.

For an ordinary examination, the teacher knows the questions and the student has to guess. In this examination the questions have been public for nearly two thousand years. **The real mystery is whether we have noticed that we are already answering them.**

What Is the Examination Examining

Before opening the examination paper, we need to ask a more basic question. What is this examination examining? Is Heaven checking ten isolated accomplishments, or is it examining the human being who performed them?

That question changes the entire class. If the Final Exam were merely a list of ten things to do, we could memorize the list and try to accumulate the correct answers. But the ten questions do something deeper. Together, they examine the architecture of a human being. They ask what governed us, how we thought, how we gave and restrained ourselves, how we treated people, what we transmitted and whether Hashem's Kingship became visible in our actual lives.

The first question beneath all ten questions is therefore not, 'What did I accomplish?' It is, 'Who am I?' And immediately behind that stands a second question: 'Who am I capable of becoming?'

Moshe Asks to Know Hashem

That question takes us to one of the most mysterious conversations in the Torah. After the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe asks Hashem, 'Show me, please, Your ways.' He then asks, 'Show me, please, Your glory.' Hashem answers, 'You cannot see My face, for no human being can see Me and live.'

Moshe cannot be shown the Divine essence. The Infinite Creator cannot be contained by the human mind. But Hashem does not simply refuse him. Hashem says, 'I will cause all My goodness to pass before you,' and then reveals the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. Moshe cannot know what Hashem is in His essence, but he can be taught how Hashem makes Himself known through His conduct: mercy, patience, truth, kindness, forgiveness and justice.

Why does Moshe need to know this? On the simplest level, he is pleading for the Jewish people and seeking the ways through which they can obtain mercy. But there is a deeper question inside his request. The Torah has already said that the human being was created in the image and likeness of Hashem, and the Torah commands us to walk in His ways. Moshe is therefore asking not only, 'Who are You?' He is asking, in effect, 'Who am I meant to be?'

If I was created to resemble You, and if my task is to emulate You, then I cannot understand my own possibilities until I learn the ways through which You reveal Yourself. **The only way I can know what a human being can become is by learning what Hashem has shown a human being how to imitate.** When Moshe asks to know Hashem's ways, he is also asking for the map of the human soul.

Hashem's answer establishes the boundary and the mission at the same time. You cannot know My essence. But you can know My ways. You cannot become Divine. But you can become Godly in your conduct. You can make mercy, patience, truth and faithfulness visible inside a human life.

Moshe and the Yom Kippur revelation

This conversation occurs after the sin of the Golden Calf, at the very birth of the process that will culminate in Yom Kippur. Moshe is not asking an abstract theological question. He is asking how a damaged people can return, how the covenant can survive failure and how Hashem's mercy can enter a world in which human beings have sinned.

Hashem answers by revealing the Thirteen Attributes. The Gemara describes Hashem as wrapping Himself like a shaliach tzibbur and teaching Moshe the order of mercy. The promise is not merely that the Jewish people can pronounce these words. The deeper demand is that they perform them. We invoke Hashem's patience most truthfully when we become patient; we invoke His compassion when another person encounters compassion through us.

That is why knowing Hashem and knowing oneself meet on Yom Kippur. Hashem shows Moshe the ways of mercy so that those ways can become the path of human return.

Tzelem and Demus

The Torah introduces the human being with two words: 'Let Us make man b'tzalmeinu kidmuseinu' - in Our image and according to Our likeness. Tzelem means image or form. Demus means similarity or likeness. Neither can refer to physical resemblance, because Hashem has no body. They describe the spiritual design and responsibility of the human being.

We can understand tzelem as the form that becomes visible from the outside: the conduct, choices and actions through which a person reflects Hashem's ways. Demus points to the inner resemblance: the capacities and qualities placed within the soul that make such conduct possible. Tzelem is the Divine pattern expressed in life. Demus is the inner possibility of becoming similar in the only way a created being can be similar to the Creator - by choosing to act according to His revealed ways.

This distinction matters. A person may perform an outward act of kindness while inwardly craving control or praise. The tzelem has appeared in the action, but the demus has not yet fully shaped the person. Or a person may feel compassion but never translate it into conduct. The inner capacity is present, but the image has not

become visible. The goal is integrity between the two: that the qualities of the soul become the form of the life.

The Ramak writes at the beginning of Tomer Devorah that a person must resemble his Creator, and that if he resembles Him in form but not in action, he falsifies the form. **The Divine image is not merely an honor we possess. It is a truth we are required to reveal.** Our actions are supposed to make visible what Hashem placed within us.

That is why the most important knowledge a person can acquire is knowledge of who he really is. If I think I am merely an intelligent animal with religious obligations added from the outside, then every mitzvah will feel like an intrusion upon my authentic self. But if I understand that I possess a Jewish soul patterned with Godly capacities, then Torah is not asking me to become someone foreign. Torah is teaching my deepest self how to emerge.

Teshuvah means returning to the design

We often begin teshuvah with the question, ‘What did I do wrong?’ That is essential, but it is not the first question. The first question is, ‘Who am I?’ Until I understand what the neshamah contains, I cannot understand what an aveirah conceals or what teshuvah restores.

A famous image associated with Michelangelo describes the sculptor as seeing a form already hidden within the marble and removing whatever prevents it from being seen. The sculptor does not paste a figure onto the stone. He uncovers the form that the excess stone concealed.

Teshuvah can be understood in the same way. It is not the manufacture of an artificial, superhuman personality. Ego, resentment, fear, habit and appetite can cover the Divine form, but they do not become the deepest definition of the soul. Teshuvah removes what prevents the soul’s design from entering action.

This does not deny responsibility. What we did is real, and repair may be costly. But shame says, ‘Because I did something low, I must be a low being.’ Teshuvah says, ‘Because my life contradicted the greatness placed within me, I must return.’ The distance between my conduct and my neshamah is not proof that return is impossible. It is the reason return is required.

Are You Only Human

This is where the title of my book came from. Rabbi Yaacov Haber recalled that his rebbe, Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, would hear a person defend a failure by

saying, 'What do you want from me? I am only human.' Rav Scheinberg challenged the assumption hidden inside those words.

We use 'only human' to mean weak, reactive, jealous, tired, angry and limited. Human beings certainly are limited, and failure is part of human life. But weakness is not the complete definition of a human being. An animal follows the nature implanted within it. A human being can notice an instinct, judge it, place Hashem's will above it and choose another response.

We often use the word spirituality for a certain feeling or atmosphere. We picture a person sitting peacefully in a field, separated from the noise of life, perhaps with arms extended and a sense of being transported beyond the ordinary. That may be a calming or even meaningful experience, but it is not yet the Torah's definition of spirituality.

Real spirituality is when a human being rises above a natural tendency in order to act in a Divine fashion. It occurs when I naturally want to retaliate but choose restraint; when I want to keep but choose to give; when my ego wants the final word but I make room for another person; when comfort pulls in one direction and Hashem's will calls me in another. Spirituality is not primarily an escape from ordinary life. It is the moment that the Divine image governs ordinary life.

To be human is not something small. It is to possess a neshamah capable of reflecting Hashem's revealed ways. The question mark in the title changes the claim. Are you only human? Or have you misunderstood how much Hashem placed inside a human being? The Final Exam is not asking whether we escaped our humanity. It is asking whether we discovered it.

Ten Sefiros One Soul

This is where the sefiros enter the discussion. The word can sound remote or mystical, so we must begin with what it does not mean. The sefiros are not separate powers, and they are not pieces of Hashem. Hashem is absolutely one. The sefiros are the measured modes through which His conduct is revealed within creation. They give us language for what Hashem does, not a definition of what Hashem is.

Hashem reveals wisdom and understanding. He gives and restrains. He joins compassion to judgment. He carries His purpose through resistance, makes room for another, forms bonds and rules. The Torah's inner language calls these modes Kesser, Chochmah, Binah, Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferes, Netzach, Hod, Yesod and Malchus.

The astonishing teaching is that the human soul contains corresponding capacities. The sefiros are not only a description of how Hashem conducts the world;

they are the inner architecture of the person created b'tzelem Elokim. The neshamah can receive wisdom, develop understanding, give, restrain itself, create harmony, persist, yield its ego, form faithful bonds and accept Hashem as King. Above them stands Kesser, the crown of will that asks which will governs the entire person.

The sefiros are therefore not ten personality types. A person may say, 'I am naturally a Chesed person,' because giving comes easily while boundaries do not. Another may be naturally strong in Gevurah and find warmth difficult. A natural strength is a gift, but it is not permission to remain incomplete. The mature soul becomes available to the Divine quality the present moment requires.

How an Idea Becomes a World

We can see the entire structure whenever a human being produces something - even something as ordinary as building a house. But the process does not begin with the first sketch. **It begins with Kesser: What is the ultimate will?**

Why does this person want a house? Is the goal status, comfort or investment? Or does he want to create a home in which a family can grow, guests can be welcomed and a Jewish life can be lived? Long before the architect draws a line, the deepest will has already determined what kind of house this will become. **Kesser is not merely the first item on a list. It is the purpose that gives direction to everything beneath it.**

Only then comes Chochmah, the first flash of the idea: perhaps a home can be built here. Binah takes that point and develops it into a detailed plan - the rooms, measurements, materials and costs. Daas attaches the plan to the person so that it is no longer an interesting possibility. He commits himself to it and mobilizes his energies to make it real.

Sometimes the ten sefiros are counted with Kesser and without Daas; sometimes they are described with Daas and without counting Kesser separately. We are still speaking about ten, not eleven. Kesser is the will and purpose above the conscious process. Daas is the point at which what the mind knows becomes personally binding and can enter the qualities of the heart.

The plan then passes through the six middos, the six directions through which potential moves toward production. Chesed seeks to expand: more space, more light and more possibilities. Gevurah establishes limits: the budget, measurements, walls and building regulations. Tiferes brings the competing elements into a harmonious design. Netzach supplies the determination to continue through delays and obstacles. Hod makes room for expertise, reality and necessary adjustment. Yesod gathers the separate systems and directs them toward one completed result.

Finally comes Malchus. Malchus does not merely want, imagine or plan the house. **Malchus is the house standing as an actual reality - a place in which people can live.** The purpose that was hidden in Kesser has become visible in the world.

If all these powers are necessary to build a physical house, they are certainly necessary to build a human being, a marriage, a family and a Jewish life. **The movement of the sefiros is simple: from ultimate will, to thought, to character, to action, until the hidden purpose becomes a lived reality.**

The same movement occurs in a mitzvah. In welcoming a guest, Kesser determines why I am opening my home; Chochmah notices the need; Binah plans; Chesed gives; Gevurah protects proper boundaries; Tiferes balances needs; Netzach follows through; Hod listens; Yesod creates belonging; and Malchus is the door actually opening and the guest sitting at the table. The accompanying chart follows this example across all ten sefiros. **A mitzvah becomes complete when the highest will travels all the way down into action.**

Why mercy is rooted in Kesser

When we speak about Hashem, Kesser points to the ultimate will that stands above the unfolding of creation. Chazal teach that Torah preceded the world and that the Jewish people arose in Hashem's thought. In the language of this class, Torah and the Jewish people belong to Kesser because they express the purpose for which the world exists: a people joined to Hashem through Torah, revealing His presence within ordinary life.

This also explains why the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy are associated with Kesser. They are not merely emergency techniques used after something has gone wrong. They reveal something deeper about Hashem's ultimate will. After the Golden Calf, strict justice alone could have brought the story of the Jewish people to an end. But Hashem revealed to Moshe that His deepest will is not the destruction of His people. His will is that the covenant endure, that the sinner be able to return and that failure not be granted the final word.

Mercy does not mean that nothing matters. If nothing mattered, there would be no need for forgiveness. Mercy means that even when sin is real, Hashem's ultimate purpose is deeper than the sin. The Thirteen Attributes open a path by which the relationship can survive judgment and the Jewish people can return to the purpose for which they were created.

That is the meaning of Kesser on Yom Kippur. We are not asking Hashem to abandon His standards. We are asking Him to relate to us from His deepest will: the will that there be a Jewish people, that Torah live through them and that

they return after failure. **Teshuvah is possible because destruction is not Hashem's ultimate desire. Return is.**

The sefiros within the human form

The traditional language of Patach Eliyahu describes the sefiros as one human form. Chochmah is associated with the mind and Binah with the understanding heart. Chesed is the right arm and Gevurah the left arm. Tiferes is the torso. Netzach and Hod are the two legs. Yesod is covenant and transmission. Malchus is the mouth, where the hidden person becomes expressed.

The point is not anatomy. The point is unity. An arm detached from a body cannot perform chesed, and a leg that refuses the direction of the mind does not carry the person toward the proper destination. In the same way, no sefirah fulfills its purpose in isolation. Chesed needs Gevurah. Netzach needs Hod. Wisdom must reach the heart, and the entire inner person must eventually speak through Malchus.

On Yom Kippur, we do not ask only whether one isolated part failed. We ask whether the whole human form became aligned: mind, heart, will, relationships, persistence, humility, transmission and action.

The seven lower sefiros are also reflected in the seven shepherds of the Jewish people: Avraham embodies Chesed; Yitzchak, Gevurah; Yaakov, Tiferes; Moshe, Netzach; Aharon, Hod; Yosef, Yesod; and David, Malchus. Each shepherd did not merely possess a quality; he opened that path within the Jewish soul. The accompanying chart places these shepherds beside the corresponding sefiros and parts of the human form. **On Yom Kippur, the question is which inherited capacity Hashem is asking us to reveal now.**

How Chazal Produce Exactly Ten Questions

The familiar passage in Shabbos gives six questions. When a person is brought to judgment, he is asked: Did you conduct your business faithfully? Did you establish fixed times for Torah? Did you involve yourself in building the next generation? Did you anticipate salvation? Did you engage in wisdom? Did you understand one matter from within another?

The same passage says that yiras Shamayim is the storehouse that preserves everything. The Gemara compares it to a small measure of preservative mixed into a great quantity of wheat. Without it, the impressive mountain of grain will eventually decay.

Yiras Shamayim means that there is a will above my will. Hashem is not invited into my life only when His will agrees with mine. His will is the governing truth of my life. This is Kesser, the crown that gives direction to every other quality.

The Reishis Chochmah records three further questions: Did you occupy yourself with acts of loving-kindness? Did you make your fellow person a king over you with pleasantness? Did you coronate your Creator morning and evening?

Now count. Shabbos gives six questions. Yiras Shamayim is the storehouse that preserves them, bringing us to seven. The Reishis Chochmah adds Chesed, honoring another person royally and coronating Hashem. Six plus one plus three. Exactly ten.

These are not ten arbitrary religious questions. They correspond to the ten sefiros because the Heavenly Court is examining whether the ten capacities of the Divine image became visible in the person's life. **The Final Exam asks one question in ten forms: Did you become the human being Hashem created you to become?**

The storehouse on Yom Kippur

The image of the storehouse is especially important on Yom Kippur. We can spend a day doing holy things and still leave the throne of the self untouched. We can fast and resent everyone around us. We can say Al Chet while privately maintaining that every conflict was the other person's fault. We can stand before Hashem while comfort, reputation or the need to be right still wears the crown.

Kesser does not ask whether I felt religious. It asks what stood above me. When my desire and Hashem's will pointed in different directions, which will governed? Chesed without that crown can become a demand for appreciation. Gevurah can become control. Torah can become intellectual vanity. Even beautiful qualities need a storehouse that preserves them.

From Kesser to Malchus

We will not treat the ten questions as ten unrelated lectures, and we are not attempting to master an entire mystical system. We simply want to know who we are. We will follow the same clear movement as the house: from Kesser, the ultimate will, through mind and character, until we reach Malchus, the life that becomes visible.

Do not feel that you must leave carrying ten resolutions. **Listen for the one question that seems to know your name.**

The Crown and the Mind

Kesser asks whether yiras Shamayim was the storehouse of our life. The question is not whether we never wanted the wrong thing. It is what happened when our will collided with Hashem's will. **Which desire possessed final authority?**

The conflict may involve gossip, money, resentment or a mitzvah that has become inconvenient. It may even arrive in religious clothing: I enjoy public kindness but resent the quiet obligation at home. Kesser asks whether I serve Hashem or the version of myself that enjoys appearing to serve Him.

Chochmah asks whether we engaged in wisdom. Its human quality is receptivity. A person cannot acquire wisdom while assuming that he already understands everything. Chochmah begins when the ego becomes quiet enough to receive something greater than itself.

Many people attend a class hoping to hear a better version of what they already believe. Chochmah asks whether I permitted Torah to correct me. It may appear when a spouse, child, teacher or difficult event tells me something I do not wish to know, and I become quiet enough to ask whether a truth is trying to enter.

Binah asks whether we understood one matter from within another. Binah develops the seed of Chochmah. It compares, distinguishes and draws consequences. A person may know that anger is destructive and still build no plan for the next moment of anger. Binah asks: What pattern produces the failure? What warning signs appear first? Which boundary or routine must change?

This is why Binah is connected to teshuvah. Return begins when understanding becomes specific enough to show a road home. Chochmah may teach that every person is created b'tzelem Elokim. Binah asks what that truth requires when I speak to the person who irritates me.

The Heart That Gives Restrains and Balances

The will and the mind now enter the heart through Chesed, Gevurah and Tiferes: the two arms and the torso. They teach us when to extend ourselves, when to establish a boundary and how to create harmony between the two.

Chesed asks whether we occupied ourselves with acts of loving-kindness. The question is not only whether we performed occasional favors. Did we become people through whom another person could receive time, money, attention, encouragement or room to breathe?

True Chesed begins with the recipient rather than the giver. It asks not, 'What do I enjoy giving?' but, 'What does this person need?' Sometimes kindness is a meal.

Sometimes it is a telephone call, a ride, patient listening or allowing another person to retain dignity while receiving help.

The Gift That Did Not Bear His Name

For more than three decades, children in Montreal received new bicycles from someone they knew only as 'Mr. Bike Man.' The man behind the name was Avrum 'Avi' Morrow, a Jewish businessman and co-founder of Avmor. As a child, he had desperately wanted a bicycle, but his parents could not afford one. When they finally gave him a red Raleigh, he treasured it so much that he later remembered cleaning its spokes with a toothpick.

Approaching his sixtieth birthday, Morrow decided that he did not need another possession. He remembered the longing of the child he had been. Working with Sun Youth, he began providing new bicycles, helmets and locks to children recognized for courage, perseverance or good deeds. Over thirty-three years, 'Mr. Bike Man' gave approximately 1,700 bicycles to Montreal children.

But the detail that makes the story Chesed is that the bicycles carried no plaque with his name. He did not stand on a platform demanding gratitude. For decades, the children knew only 'Mr. Bike Man.' He met a genuine childhood need in someone else and then stepped out of the picture so that the child, not the giver, remained at the center.

The examination question is not merely whether I gave. It asks whether another person's need became more important than my need to be recognized for giving.

Gevurah asks whether we conducted our business faithfully. Money awakens desire, fear and competition. Gevurah establishes the boundary and says: I could profit from this, but it is not mine. I could conceal this, but it would not be honest.

The words *nasasa venasata be'emunah* ask whether business was conducted with faith. Did I believe that Hashem determines livelihood, or did I imagine that dishonesty could deliver something He had withheld? **Emunah spoken in shul is precious. Emunah that costs money reveals Gevurah.**

Tiferes asks whether we anticipated salvation. Tiferes joins forces that appear opposed: kindness and judgment, giving and restraint, compassion and truth. Our present world does not yet display that harmony. To anticipate salvation is to refuse to accept brokenness as the world's final form.

This is not passive optimism. A person who longs for a repaired world begins repairing the portion within reach. If I pray for peace among the Jewish people, I

cannot cherish every private quarrel. If I believe in personal teshuvah, I cannot confuse a repeated failure with a final identity. Tiferes can name what is wrong without declaring that wrong is all that can ever be.

The Powers That Carry Life Forward

The movement continues through Netzach, Hod and Yesod. These are the powers through which a life keeps moving, makes room and carries its values into the future.

Netzach asks whether we established fixed times for Torah. Inspiration rises and falls. A protected appointment with Torah declares that truth is not dependent upon mood. Netzach does not ask whether every day was perfect. It asks whether we returned. **A missed day is not a surrendered life. Netzach is the capacity to say, 'I am the person who returns.'**

Hod asks whether we made another person a king over us with pleasantness. Hod is humility, acknowledgment and the willingness to yield space. Chesed says, 'I have something to give you.' Hod says, 'Your existence has a dignity I must recognize.'

This does not require surrendering judgment or obeying every demand. It means another person did not have to fight for the right to exist in our presence. We listened without humiliating. Our tone did not turn assistance into another form of domination. Sometimes the clearest act of Hod is the sentence, 'You are right; I was wrong.'

Yesod asks: What continued beyond me? The Gemara asks whether we involved ourselves in building the next generation. The careful word is asakta - did you involve yourself. Results are not always within human control. The question is whether we participated responsibly in carrying Jewish life forward.

That includes marriage and raising children when Hashem grants those opportunities. It also includes supporting families, helping people marry, teaching, mentoring and transmitting Torah. **The next generation learns not only what Judaism says but what Judaism feels like in our presence.** Yesod asks whether everything holy we received ended with us.

The Life That Becomes Visible

Finally we reach Malchus. A person may possess beautiful intentions, strong feelings and profound ideas. But what did another person hear from his mouth? What did his family experience? What happened when money was involved, when he was tired or when someone challenged him? Malchus asks what kingdom was actually created by the life he lived.

The Reishis Chochmah asks, 'Did you coronate your Creator morning and evening?' Through Krias Shema, a Jew declares that the day does not belong to him. His abilities, possessions, schedule and life are entrusted to him for the service of Hashem.

The question is not merely whether we pronounced Hashem Echad. Did those words govern what happened after the siddur closed? Morning Shema asks who owns the coming day. Evening Shema asks what we did with the day entrusted to us.

We began with the ultimate will in Kesser and have arrived at the finished house in Malchus. **The purpose of the entire structure is that Hashem's will should not remain an idea. It should become recognizable in an actual human life.**

A Yom Kippur review of the ten questions

The accompanying chart gathers each sefirah, the question of the Heavenly Court, the corresponding daily avodah, the human form and shepherd, and two ways the quality becomes concrete. It may be read quickly as an overview or studied slowly, one row at a time. Follow a row from the Divine purpose to the house, from the house to the mitzvah, and from the mitzvah into one's own life. **The purpose of the chart is not to master ten definitions; it is to discover the one question that is asking to become an act.**

Kesser. Where did another will wear the crown: comfort, resentment, appetite, money, approval or the need to be right? Which crown must be returned to Hashem?

Chochmah. Who tried to teach me something that I was too defended to receive? What truth might become audible if the ego became quiet for one moment?

Binah. Which Torah idea moved me but never produced a consequence? If I truly believe it, what must change after Yom Kippur?

Chesed. Whose life could become easier because of a resource already in my hands? What does that person need, rather than what do I prefer to give?

Gevurah. Where do I need one faithful boundary? It may concern money, speech, food, a screen, anger or the way I speak at home.

Tiferes. What brokenness have I begun treating as permanent - in the world, the Jewish people, a relationship or myself? Can I see the damage honestly without declaring repair impossible?

Netzach. Which good commitment disappeared when the original inspiration faded? What is the next return - not the promise of perfection, but the next specific return?

Hod. Who does not feel fully heard or honored in my presence? Whose dignity has been limited by my tone, impatience or need to win?

Yesod. What have I received that must not end with me? Who is waiting to receive Torah, memory, encouragement, skill or faith through my relationship with them?

Malchus. What did my life actually express? After saying Shema, which part of the day still behaved as though it belonged entirely to me?

Do not choose ten dramatic resolutions. Read the questions again and notice which one creates resistance. **Very often the question we most want to skip is the one that already knows our name.** Choose one answer concrete enough to perform after the fast.

The Man Who Wanted to See Eliyahu

A man once came to his rav with an unusual request. 'I want to see Eliyahu HaNavi,' he said. 'We sing about him after Shabbos, prepare a chair for him at a bris and a cup at the Seder. I believe that he comes, but I want to see him.'

The rav told him that on Friday he should purchase generous quantities of food, wine and delicacies. At the far end of the Jewish neighborhood lived a poor widow with several young children. He was to carry everything to her home, leave the packages at the door and depart. 'If you follow my instructions,' said the rav, 'you will have an opportunity to see Eliyahu.'

The man did exactly that. The family discovered the food, and a home filled with worry became a home filled with joy. After Shabbos the man returned disappointed. 'I helped the family, but I did not see Eliyahu.' The rav told him to repeat the delivery the next Friday, but this time to wait quietly near the door.

As he approached, he heard a child ask, 'Mother, what will we eat this Shabbos? There is no food.' The widow answered, 'Do not worry. Did you see what happened last week? Eliyahu HaNavi came and brought us everything we needed. The same Hashem who sent Eliyahu last week can send him again.'

The man had come hoping to see a mysterious visitor from another world. From the other side of the door, he discovered that he had been seeing him all along. He had allowed Hashem's Chesed to enter another home through an ordinary pair of human hands.

That is the central claim of the sefiros. We wait to encounter holiness as though it must descend in a form we will recognize. Hashem waits to see whether His revealed ways will enter the world through us.

The Examination Is Already in Progress

We assumed that the Final Exam begins when we enter the Heavenly Court. In truth, by then the examination paper will already be complete. **The ten questions arrive in our homes, businesses, learning, prayers and relationships every day.**

A financial opportunity asks about Gevurah. A person who needs us asks about Chesed. A truth we resist asks about Chochmah. The practical consequence asks about Binah. An insult asks about Hod. A fading commitment asks about Netzach. A child, student or younger Jew asks about Yesod. Morning and evening ask about Malchus. Above all of them, Kesser asks whose will will govern the answer.

At the end of a day, a person can ask: Which of the ten questions did Hashem place before me today? How did I answer it? Which capacity of my neshamah became visible, and which answer can I improve when the question returns?

This is not all or nothing. Every better answer reveals another measure of the tzelem Elokim. Every act of teshuvah allows the inner demus to become more visible in the outer tzelem. We are not manufacturing a foreign self. We are allowing the Jewish soul to become recognizable in the life it lives.

The final advantage of this world

The Tzlach teaches that the closeness to Hashem created through a mitzvah in this world possesses an advantage that cannot be duplicated even in Olam Haba. In Olam Haba there is revealed closeness, but there is no longer the opportunity to choose another mitzvah, overcome another impulse or bring Hashem into another difficult human situation.

That teaching gives us the final surprise. The Heavenly Court may announce the questions later, but the examination can only be taken now. Only here can a financial temptation become Gevurah, an interruption become Hod, a tired evening become Netzach and an ordinary conversation become Malchus.

Yom Kippur is therefore not merely preparation for a future judgment. It is the day on which we recognize the examination that has been taking place all year and ask Hashem for the privilege of answering the next question differently.

Choose the Question That Knows Your Name

Do not leave carrying ten resolutions. Look at the ten questions and choose the one that has been appearing repeatedly in your life under different names. It may look like the same argument, the same temptation, the same interruption, the same neglected person or the same abandoned commitment.

Perhaps that recurring situation is not keeping you from your spiritual work. Perhaps it is the examination question assigned to you.

Choose one answer small enough to become real. One fixed time. One honest disclosure. One person called. One apology made without explanation. One boundary protected. One part of the day returned to the King. The soul is vast, but teshuvah enters life through a particular door.

This class is drawn from the concluding chapter of my book, Are You Only Human. The book does what one lecture cannot do: it spends time with each of the ten sefiros and then with the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, showing how they enter ordinary decisions, relationships and teshuvah. If one of these questions felt as though it knew your name, the book offers an opportunity to continue that conversation.

You are not ‘only’ human. You are human: created in the image and likeness of Hashem, entrusted with His ways and capable of revealing His presence through the choices of an ordinary day.

The next question may arrive as a business decision, an interruption, a disagreement, a prayer, a tired child, a person who needs to be heard or a private struggle no one else will see. **When it arrives, remember: this is not preparation for the examination. This is the examination.**

Sources

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- Rema, Orach Chaim 624:5; Mishnah Berurah 624:19, on beginning the sukkah immediately after Yom Kippur.
- Vayikra Rabbah 34:3, the teachings of Hillel on caring for the soul and body.
- Bereishis 1:26-27 - the human being created in the image and likeness of Elokim.
- Shemos 33:13, 33:18-23 and 34:5-7 - Moshe asks to know Hashem's ways and glory; Hashem reveals His goodness and attributes.
- Rosh Hashanah 17b; Maharal, Be'er HaGolah, Be'er 4 - the Thirteen Attributes as a pattern to be performed, not merely recited.
- Shabbos 133b and Sotah 14a - walking in Hashem's ways by imitating His revealed conduct.
- Ramak, Tomer Devorah, opening of chapter 1 - the obligation to resemble the Creator through action.
- Bereishis Rabbah 1:4 - Torah and the Jewish people precede the created world in Hashem's purpose; the thought of Israel precedes everything.
- Patach Eliyahu, introduction to Tikkunei Zohar - the sefiros described through the integrated human form; Kesser and Daas as alternate ways of completing the count of ten.
- Shabbos 31a - the six questions and yiras Hashem as the storehouse.
- Sanhedrin 7a with Rashi - the primacy of Torah in judgment.
- Reishis Chochmah, Shaar HaYirah, chapter 12, quoting Maseches Chibut HaKever, chapter 4 - Torah, chesed, coronating Hashem and honoring another person royally.

- Additional sources: Rabbi Yaacov Haber's recollection of Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg in the book's introduction; Sivan Rahav-Meir, Ligdol 2; and the Global News Montreal and Governor General of Canada profiles of Avrum Morrow.