

What Can Shabbos Give Yom Kippur

A Shabbos Shuva Morning Class

Shabbos Shuva 5787

Developed and Presented by Rabbi Yossi Michalowicz

This class is based on a shiur by Rabbi Eliyahu Wolf in Me'at Min HaOr.

The Questions

This morning I would like to begin with two questions. They grow out of one remarkable statement in the Zohar, and together they may change the way we understand this Shabbos.

First: the Zohar teaches that the six days of the coming week receive their blessing from the Shabbos that precedes them. Does that principle include every day of the week, even when one of those days is Yom Kippur?

Second: if the answer is yes, then we are facing an extraordinary claim. Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year. It is called Shabbat Shabbaton. It does not seem spiritually dependent on anything else. What, then, is so unique about Shabbos Shuva that its virtue is great enough to nurture blessing even into Yom Kippur?

Those are our two questions. The second sharpens the first: **What can Shabbos possibly give Yom Kippur?**

Two Days Called Shabbat Shabbaton

Look at Source 1. Notice the same expression in the two pesukim.

The first pasuk describes the seventh day: 'On the seventh day there shall be a Shabbat Shabbaton, sacred to Hashem.' The second describes Yom Kippur: 'It is a Shabbat Shabbaton for you, and you shall afflict yourselves.' The Torah gives the same elevated name to two very different days.

Shabbos and Yom Kippur share the language of complete cessation, but their lived experiences are almost opposites. Shabbos is built around oneg: a set table, wine, challah, meat, sleep, song, family, and the physical pleasure of a holy day. Yom Kippur is built around inui: no food, no drink, no washing, no anointing, no leather shoes, and no marital relations. On Shabbos, the body participates through enjoyment. On Yom Kippur, the body participates through restraint.

This does not mean that teshuvah is generally a retreat from physical pleasure. That would be a mistaken premise. **The Torah does not ask the Jew to despise the physical world. It asks the Jew to sanctify it.** The question is subtler. Yom Kippur has a distinctive avodah of stepping away from ordinary bodily needs for one day. Shabbos has a distinctive avodah of bringing those very bodily experiences into the service of Hashem. How can the day of oneg prepare and bless the day of inui?

Perhaps the shared phrase Shabbat Shabbaton is already telling us that these two days are not rivals. **They are two forms of the same deep rest:** the soul ceases to be dragged by habit. On Yom Kippur, we silence the body. On Shabbos, we teach the body to sing.

Let me ask the question another way. Which is the greater spiritual test: to refrain from a meal for one sacred day, or to sit at a beautiful meal and make every part of it sacred? There is no simple answer, because the Torah asks both of us. There are times when holiness means saying no. There are other times when holiness means saying yes in the right way, with the right measure, the right berachah, and the right purpose. The Torah calls both days Shabbat Shabbaton because both free us from slavery to impulse. One does it through inui; the other does it through oneg.

The Day That Supplies the Week

Look at Source 2. The Zohar gives us the premise of the entire class in only four words.

Minah misbarchan kol shisa yomin: **from Shabbos, all six days are blessed.** Shabbos is not merely the last day of the previous week. Spiritually, it is the source from which the coming week draws its vitality. Sunday receives from Shabbos. Monday receives from Shabbos. Every ordinary day carries something that was planted in the Shabbos before it.

And if Yom Kippur falls during the six days that follow Shabbos Shuva, then Yom Kippur, too, receives from that Shabbos. That is the startling implication. It means that Shabbos Shuva cannot be understood merely as a convenient Shabbos located between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It has an achievement of its own, a spiritual quality that Yom Kippur needs.

Let us sharpen the question. What can a regular Shabbos contribute to Yom Kippur? Yom Kippur has the Kohen Gadol, the avodah of the day, the five tefillos, vidui, fasting, and the promise of kapparah. It is the day on which Moshe Rabbeinu descended with the second luchos and announced that the sin of the Golden Calf had been forgiven. What is missing that must be supplied by the Shabbos before it?

There is another detail worth noticing. The Zohar does not merely say that Shabbos inspires the coming week. Inspiration can be remembered or forgotten. It says the days are blessed from Shabbos. A berachah enters the recipient and gives it capacity. The question is therefore not only what idea Yom Kippur learns from Shabbos Shuva. The question is **what spiritual capacity Shabbos Shuva places inside Yom Kippur** that the great day will later activate.

Rabbi Akiva once observed water dripping steadily onto a stone. No individual drop appeared powerful. Yet over time the drops carved the stone. He said: if water can enter stone, Torah can enter my heart. Keep that image in mind. We often imagine teshuvah as one enormous leap. Shabbos Shuva begins with a

different truth: the steady holiness already placed inside life can penetrate what a dramatic moment alone may not reach.

The Connection to Purim

Look at Source 3. The Torah and the Megillah place the word goral at the center of two very different days.

On Yom Kippur, Aharon places lots upon the two goats: one lot for Hashem and one for Azazel. On Purim, Haman casts a pur, which the Megillah immediately translates as hagonal, the lot. The name Purim itself preserves that act.

The similarity is not merely external or technical. The goral points to a relationship deeper than calculation: **the inner, essential bond between the Jewish neshamah and Hashem.** That essential connection appears in the avodah of Yom Kippur and again in Purim.

But the two days reveal that bond in opposite settings. Yom Kippur does so when we rise above the ordinary physical world. Purim does so from inside a feast, wine, gifts of food, friendship, money for the poor, and the noisy confusion of human life.

At this point a real question emerges: What does it mean to compare Purim to Yom Kippur? They seem to be opposite days. On one we fast; on the other we feast. On one we withdraw from ordinary physical pleasure; on the other physical celebration is part of the mitzvah. Why should the Zohar place them together?

Look at Source 4. Here is the crucial formulation: Yom Kippur is like Purim.

The word HaKippurim can be read as k'mo Purim - like Purim. The kaf is understood as the kaf hadimyon, the letter of comparison. This does not say that Purim resembles Yom Kippur. It says something more surprising: **Yom Kippur resembles Purim. Purim is the primary model**, while Yom Kippur is 'like Purim.'

Why is Purim primary? Because the purpose of a person in this world is not simply to escape physicality. It is to take the world, including physical life, and **make it a dwelling place for Hashem.** Yom Kippur reveals the essential bond through spiritual separation; Purim reveals it while we are engaged with food, drink, friendship, generosity, and celebration.

Look at Source 5. The contrast becomes concrete in the halachic character of the two days.

The Torah says of Yom Kippur, 'You shall afflict yourselves.' The Gemara says of Purim, 'A person is obligated to become intoxicated on Purim until he does not know the difference between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai.' Whatever the precise halachic parameters of that statement, the contrast is unmistakable. Yom Kippur serves Hashem through fasting. Purim serves Hashem through feasting.

Here is the point: **physicality itself is not the enemy of teshuvah**. The same person who serves Hashem by not eating on Yom Kippur can serve Hashem by eating on Shabbos and Purim. The question is never simply, 'Did I use the physical world?' The question is, 'Who was in command, and what did that physical experience become?'

Food can make a person forget Hashem, and food can become a berachah, a seudah, hachnasas orchim, family peace, and gratitude. Money can become ego and anxiety, or tzedakah and honest support for a family. Speech can become gossip, or comfort and Torah. Rest can become laziness, or oneg Shabbos that restores a Jew to avodas Hashem. **Teshuvah does not erase life. It redirects life.**

This is the advantage of Purim over Yom Kippur. **Purim demonstrates that the deepest bond with Hashem can be expressed from within material life itself.** That prepares us to understand the special power of Shabbos Shuva.

The Achievement of Shabbos Shuva

Look at Source 6. These two short verses state the avodah of Shabbos Shuva.

Yeshayahu says, 'You shall call Shabbos a delight, and the holy day of Hashem honored.' Mishlei says, 'In all your ways know Him, and He will straighten your paths.' Not outside all your ways. Not only in shul. Not only while fasting. Bekhol derachecha da'eihu - in all your ways, know Him.

That is what makes Shabbos Shuva unique. It occurs in the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, when every Jew is thinking about change, judgment, forgiveness, and closeness to Hashem. But the teshuvah of this day is practiced while we make Kiddush, eat challah, speak with our families, rest, and enjoy the gifts of the physical world. Shabbos Shuva says: **do not leave your teshuvah in the machzor. Bring it to the table.**

It asks concrete questions. How do I speak at a Shabbos meal? Do people feel smaller or larger after a conversation with me? Is my home merely where I recover from public life, or is it the first place where my avodas Hashem must be visible? When I enjoy something, do I receive it with gratitude or entitlement? When I rest, do I emerge more capable of patience, prayer, learning, and kindness?

We can each choose one area before Yom Kippur. Perhaps it is not an additional hour in shul but a different five minutes at home. Perhaps it is putting down the phone when another person is speaking. Perhaps it is saying a berachah slowly once a day. Perhaps it is refusing to carry irritation from work through the front door. Perhaps it is allowing Shabbos peace to govern a disagreement. These acts may look too small for the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah. But this is precisely the teaching: the holiness that enters the smallest repeated act may be the holiness that lasts.

The greatness of Shabbos Shuva is not that it imitates Yom Kippur early. We do not turn Shabbos into a fast. Its greatness is precisely that it remains Shabbos: oneg, honor, food, drink, sleep, song, and family. In that complete human setting, it demonstrates that teshuvah can inhabit a physical life.

Now we can begin to answer the central question. What can Shabbos give Yom Kippur? It can give Yom Kippur a destination. Yom Kippur can lift us above the world, but eventually Neilah ends. We eat. We go home. We return to work, phones, bills, kitchens, traffic, disagreements, and all the details of being human. Shabbos Shuva plants within Yom Kippur **the power for its holiness to return with us.**

The holy day does not succeed only when a person cries during vidui. It succeeds when those tears become a gentler voice at home, a more honest transaction, a guarded sentence, a repaired relationship, a fixed time for Torah, and a berachah said as though the food truly came from Hashem. Shabbos Shuva supplies that bridge before Yom Kippur even begins.

Return to Rabbi Akiva's stone. A dramatic wave can wash over a stone and leave it unchanged. A drop that returns to the same point again and again enters the stone. Yom Kippur is the great wave. Shabbos teaches us the holy drop: Kiddush every week, a berachah every meal, restraint in one conversation, honesty in one decision, patience in one relationship. Shabbos Shuva says that the great awakening must become a faithful rhythm.

When We Are Like Angels

Look at Source 7. Chazal describe what happens to the Jewish people on Yom Kippur.

Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer compares us to the ministering angels. The angels do not eat or drink; neither do we. They are at peace with one another; so should we be. They are clean from sin; so Israel is cleansed on Yom Kippur. We wear white garments because, for one day, we enact a different mode of existence.

There is enormous comfort in that image. The Torah believes that a human being can rise. We are not imprisoned by appetite, routine, or yesterday's mistakes. For one day, the Jew discovers that the neshamah is not a guest inside the personality. It is the deepest self.

The shiur now turns to a Jew who is accustomed to spiritual striving. On Yom Kippur he has almost no contact with the physical world. He does not eat or drink. He wears white. He spends the day immersed in tefillah and spiritual life. He may be tempted to think: What does the avodah of teshuvah demand from me today? I am already living like an angel.

Look at Source 8. The final source gives the striking answer.

He writes: Yom Kippur tells a person that although you look like an angel, although you do not eat or drink, although you are dressed in white - **teshuvah is still demanded of you. You must still rise. You must still draw closer** to the Holy One, blessed be He.

This is a profound correction to a common spiritual mistake. A person can confuse a spiritual atmosphere with spiritual arrival. I can be fasting and still carry resentment. I can wear white and still be certain that the real problem is everyone else. I can spend the day in shul and never surrender the need to be right. I can say Al Chet and keep every excuse intact.

Yom Kippur therefore teaches that **even the Jew who appears angelic must do teshuvah**. Not because the day has failed, but because closeness to Hashem has no finish line. The holier the moment, the more honestly I can see the distance that remains. The more light enters a room, the more clearly we see what still needs cleaning.

Ask yourself which danger is greater. Is it that I think I cannot change because I am too physical, too distracted, or too ordinary? Shabbos Shuva answers: your ordinary life itself can become the site of teshuvah. Or is the danger that I think I have already changed because I fasted, prayed, cried, or felt inspired? Yom Kippur answers: even the person who resembles an angel must still move closer. One day rescues us from despair; the other rescues us from complacency.

This gives us two directions of teshuvah. Shabbos Shuva speaks downward into life: bring Hashem into eating, resting, family, business, and the ordinary world. Yom Kippur speaks upward without limit: even when you have left eating and drinking behind and you resemble an angel, do not declare yourself finished. Come closer still.

We need both movements. We need the holiness of the Shabbos table and the upward striving of Neilah. We must bring Hashem into the world, and we must never imagine that our present spiritual level is the final one.

What Shabbos Gives Yom Kippur

We can now answer our two opening questions and understand the comparisons that arose along the way.

Yes, Yom Kippur receives blessing from the preceding Shabbos, because the Zohar says all six days are blessed from Shabbos. Shabbos Shuva's unique contribution is **teshuvah within complete human life**. Like Purim, it serves Hashem not by abandoning the physical world but by sanctifying it. This is the strength transmitted to Yom Kippur: **the power for Yom Kippur's holiness to enter the world to which we return**.

Yom Kippur adds its own final teaching. **Even when we appear angelic, teshuvah is still demanded**. The highest spiritual atmosphere is not the end; it calls us closer.

A Shabbos Above the Earth

I want to conclude with a true story about a Jew who had to ask a question no Jew had ever asked in quite the same way.

In January 2003, Ilan Ramon prepared to become the first Israeli astronaut. He was not traveling as a rabbi or as a man known for an observant life. He was a fighter pilot, a scientist, and a representative of the State of Israel. Yet he felt the weight of something larger. He repeatedly said that in space he would represent the entire Jewish people.

Before the flight, he approached Rabbi Zvi Konikov in Florida with an urgent question: 'Rabbi, I want to keep Shabbat while in space, but no one can tell me how to do it.' The problem was real. The shuttle would orbit the earth about once every ninety minutes. From the window, the crew could see sunrise and sunset again and again. If Shabbos follows sunset, would Shabbos arrive every few hours? Would a week last only ten and a half hours?

Rabbi Konikov brought the question to halachic authorities. Their ruling gave Ramon an earthly frame of reference: he would keep Shabbos according to the schedule of the place from which he departed, Cape Canaveral. Ramon also insisted on kosher food. NASA found sealed kosher meals that could be taken aboard.

Think about what that meant. He was traveling farther from an ordinary Jewish neighborhood than almost any Jew in history. There was no shul, no Shabbos street, no sunset that stayed in place, no familiar table, and no community around him. Yet he did not ask, 'How far away can I go before Shabbos no longer claims me?' He asked, 'How can I take Shabbos with me?'

During the mission he marked Shabbos. He had written the words of Kiddush in his diary so that he could say them in orbit. In the environment of the shuttle, he made Kiddush with what was available. The body was weightless, but the mitzvah still had to enter physical life: time, food, a drink, words spoken by a Jewish mouth.

Then came the terrible morning of February 1. Columbia was returning to earth after a sixteen-day mission. Only sixteen minutes before its expected landing, the shuttle broke apart during re-entry. Ilan Ramon and the six other crew members were killed.

The destruction was so severe that only part of the shuttle and its contents were recovered. Yet two months later, in a wet field near Palestine, Texas, searchers found pages from Ilan Ramon's diary. They were soaked, crumpled, and damaged after falling through the atmosphere. His widow, Rona, gave them to experts in Israel. Using infrared light and image-enhancement methods, they spent years recovering the writing.

Among the clearest words that survived were the words of Kiddush.

A handwritten page carrying the sanctity of Shabbos traveled into space, endured the violence of re-entry, fell to an ordinary field in Texas, and was

found. The astronaut did not return. But the Kiddush he had carried above the earth came back into the world.

That is what Shabbos gives Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur takes us into a place where we almost leave the body behind. We do not eat. We do not drink. We wear white. We become, for a day, like angels. But **the decisive question is re-entry**. What returns with us when the holiness is over? What survives the descent into the kitchen, the office, the marriage, the bank account, the difficult conversation, and the ordinary Tuesday?

Shabbos Shuva tells us that **holiness can survive re-entry** because it was never meant to remain outside the world. It was meant to be written into time, food, speech, family, work, and the repeated acts of a Jewish life.

Rabbi Akiva saw water enter stone one drop at a time. Ilan Ramon carried Kiddush beyond the earth, and the words came back through fire. This Shabbos, before we resemble angels on Yom Kippur, we ask Hashem for the blessing to become holy human beings: people who can rise very high, return to the world, and bring the holiness home.

Documentation for the Concluding Story

Rabbi Zvi Konikov, 'Shabbat in Space: The Legacy of Ilan Ramon,' Chabad.org, January 31, 2008. 'Diary Survived Shuttle Accident, Goes On Display,' WIRED, October 6, 2008.