

YOM KIPPUR

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Our Window of Opportunity



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Let's start with a story. A story set in Lithuania, 1797, where a famous Rabbi, the Vilna Gaon, was nearing the end of his life. The Rabbi had lived a full life, he had impacted many people's lives positively and had really used his days to the max. As his last hours on earth were approaching, he was surrounded by his students. Suddenly, he grabbed his Tzitzit and burst out crying. His students were startled, they hadn't seen their teacher like this before. What were they to say or do? Why was their Rabbi scared of the Afterlife – surely, he knew what great rewards awaited him?! One of the students mustered up the

courage and asked his Rabbi what the matter was. The Vilna Gaon answered him, his voice full of emotion, "All my life on this earth I could buy Tzitzit for a few pennies and earn myself huge rewards in the World to Come. Now that I am entering the World to Come, everything is going to be unchanging. I won't have any more opportunities to do more Mitzvot and earn more reward".

The story of the Vilna Gaon is imprinted in my mind as the most visual example of someone who saw his 'window of opportunity' close.

The Rabbis of the Talmud teach us that between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, all the gates of heaven are open to us: the Gate of Repentance, the Gate of Forgiveness, the Gate of Atonement. God is inviting us in every way possible to look at our lives, analyse where we

are heading and, if necessary, take out a compass and change directions. That is what Yom Kippur is about - asking ourselves, "where am I and should I be heading somewhere else?". God loves us and therefore offers us many 'windows of opportunity'. As the end of Yom Kippur draws near, the last prayer service is called '*Neilah*', which means 'the closing of the gates'; the time is drawing closer that those gates which God opened to us, are closing. Get in there while you can!

Looking at Yom Kippur as a burden, an annoyance, is very common. However, what the Vilna Gaon teaches us, is that deep within something which may seem like a burden, lies a treasure, an opportunity to earn reward and to build a life that is as beautiful as you make it. Let us grab those opportunities and turn this Yom Kippur into our biggest 'window of opportunity'.

True or False?

1. On Yom Kippur, we wear black because it is such a serious day.
2. There are 5 main *Tefillot* (prayer services) on Yom Kippur.
3. Everyone should fast, even children under 10 years old.
4. During parts of the prayer service, we kneel down, bowing all the way to the floor!
5. During *Birkat Kohanim* (Priestly Blessing), we should not look at the *Kohanim*.
6. At the end of Yom Kippur, there is a custom to go outside to pray to the moon.

1. False. There is a custom to wear white because it is the holiest day of the year and we are like angels, free of sin.
2. True. Can you name them? Kol Nidrei, Shacharit, Mussaf, Mincha, Neilah.
3. False. Some children in the year before their Bar or Bat Mitzvah do try to complete the fast, but there is no obligation for children to do so.
4. True. This happens during the prayer *Aleinu* and the prayers which recall the High Priest's service in the Temple.
5. True. We don't look at their hands, where the blessing is coming through.
6. False. There is indeed a custom to go outside at the end of Yom Kippur and say a blessing called "*Kiddush Levana*", praising God for the new moon. But we never pray to the moon, only ever to God.

Answers