

REPENTANCE BEFORE PRAYER

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

Throughout the course of prayer, our yetzer hara is constantly battling with us to distract our attention. As in any war, the victor will generally be the one who takes the time to analyze his enemy. Knowing one's opponent allows for a plan of strategy that can successfully defeat him.

According to the Zohar every sin creates a klipah, a barrier that prevents the acceptance of our tefillos. In this light, transgressions are one of the greatest causes for distraction. Attempting to repent before starting to pray removes these barriers and allows our tefillos to pass (Responsa Teshuvos V'Hanhagos 4,27).

For this reason, two berachos relating to teshuvah precede the greater part of Shemoneh Esrei, which is comprised of requests. First we ask Hashem that He should help us to return to His Torah and to assist us in doing teshuvah, and afterwards we beseech Him for forgiveness. By thinking about teshuvah while reciting these two berachos we eliminate many of the barriers that are impeding our prayers, enabling us to pray with greater concentration.

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