

TIME TO RETURN

by Shlomo Katz

Yom Kippur

Time to Return

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Sponsored by
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Today's Learning:
Bava Batra 8:7-8
O.C. (Mishnah Berurah) 13:1-3
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Ketubot 21
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Sukkah 9

Our Sages teach (Rosh Hashanah 16b): "Three books are opened on Rosh Hashanah -- one for complete resha'im / wicked people, one for complete tzaddikim / righteous people, and one for beinonim / people in between. Complete tzaddikim are inscribed immediately for life. Complete resha'im are inscribed immediately for death. Beinonim are left hanging from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur. If they merit, they are inscribed for life. If they do not merit, they are inscribed for death."

Why, asks R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav in Yerushalayim; died 1951), are there three books? Should there not be only two books, since all of the beinonim will ultimately be inscribed either in the Book of Life or, G-d forbid, the opposite book?

R' Charlap explains: There are more than two possible outcomes to the judgment of a beinoni. There are the two obvious outcomes -- life or death. However, "life" includes two sub-outcomes -- life as a

result of being inscribed in the book of the tzaddikim or life as a result of being inscribed in the book of the beinonim.

What difference does it make? R' Charlap explains further: People dislike being labeled. For example, a student will usually be pleased to hear that he has been promoted to the next grade, at least until he is told that he will be in the "lower track" or even the "regular track," but not the "honors track." Similarly, the neshamah / soul is humiliated when its host (a person) earns life, but only as a beinoni.

How then does one avoid being inscribed in the book of the beinonim? There are two methods, R' Charlap writes. The Gemara itself suggests one method: do teshuvah before Rosh Hashanah. But what if it is too late for that? The second way to avoid being inscribed in the book of the beinonim can be achieved even on Yom Kippur -- it is to repent, not motivated by fear of punishment, but motivated by love of G-d. This higher form of teshuvah can earn a person a place in the book of the tzadikim even belatedly. (Mei Marom VII p.346)

"Great is teshuvah motivated by love of G-d, for it turns sins into merits." (Yoma 86b)

R' Moshe Leib Shachor z"l (1894-1964; director of several yeshivot in Eretz Yisrael) offers several examples from Tanach that demonstrate how sins turned to merits as a result of someone's teshuvah:

After King David sinned by taking Bat Sheva, the prophet rebuked him (Shmuel II 12:9), "How could you dishonor the word of G-d, to do bad in His eyes?" King David immediately responded, "I have sinned to G-d." [Ed. note: Apparently the fact that his repentance was motivated by love of G-d is demonstrated by the fact that both the rebuke and the confession focused on G- d's honor.] What was the result? Of all of King David's wives, this particular woman, Bat Sheva, became the matriarch of the Davidic dynasty and, eventually, of mashiach.

Later, King David sinned again by taking a census. (See Shmuel II chapter 24.) As a result, a plague broke out and killed 70,000 men. After King David repented, he saw the angel of death standing on the precise spot that later became the Holy of Holies of the Bet Hamikdash. King David had been trying to identify the appropriate location, and it was specifically his sin and complete repentance that led to its discovery.

In the Book of Yehoshua (chapter 7), we read that someone stole from the booty of Jericho. G-d commanded Yehoshua to have the Jewish People draw lots as the means to identify the perpetrator, which turned out to be a man named Achan. After Achan was singled out by the lots, Yehoshua pleaded with him to confess in order to "give honor to Hashem," i.e., to confirm the validity of the lots. Achan did confess, saying, "Indeed, I have sinned to G-d, and I did such-and-such." It is precisely this formula that would be cited by the great codifier Rambam -- thousands of years later -

- as the ideal form of confession. It turns out that Achan's sin and repentance serve as an everlasting merit to him because we have learned from him how to repent. (Koach Ha'teshuvah p.18)

R' Avraham Zvi Margolis shlita (rabbi of Karmiel, Israel) writes in the name of R' Yerachmiel Yisrael Yitzchak Danziger z"l (1853-1910; the Alexanderer Rebbe; known as the "Yismach Yisrael):

Man's recognition of his sin must include recognition of the pain that he caused G-d, so-to-speak [because G-d's purpose in creating the world is frustrated by our sins]. Even if one's repentance is not motivated by fear of punishment, but rather by a recognition that one has damaged his own soul as a result of his sins, that teshuvah is incomplete if it does not take into account the pain that was caused to the Shechinah.

Unfortunately, man in his present state is generally unable to appreciate the harm that his sin has caused. Therefore, part of a penitent's prayer should be that G-d enlighten and remove the curtains and veils that separate him from G-d. Only when one appreciates what his relationship with G-d could be can he appreciate what he loses when he sins. (Dvar Ha'teshuvah p.168)

"For on this day He shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you." (Vayikra 16:30)

R' Menachem Mendel z"l (the Kotsker Rebbe; died 1859) once entered his shul before Yom Kippur and saw hundreds of chassidim in the final stages of preparing for the Holy Day. Some were reciting Tehilim. Some were saying Tefilah Zakkah (a special pre-Yom Kippur prayer excerpted in the box below). All of them were suffused with the holiness of the approaching day.

Suddenly, the Kotsker called out, "Don't count on the Day to save you. True it says, 'For on this day He shall provide atonement.' But it also says, 'for you to cleanse yourself!'" (Quoted in Birkat Chaim p.98)

In his old age, R' David Moshe Friedman z"l (1827-1903; the Chortkover Rebbe) was very weak and nearly blind, so that two attendants had to lead him wherever he went. One Erev Yom Kippur, as the attendants led him toward his seat for Kol Nidrei, he suddenly stopped and sighed deeply. Then he said, "Where are you taking me? To be judged by the King of Kings? But I have not yet repented properly!" And he began to sob uncontrollably.

Soon, all the onlookers were crying uncontrollably as well, and everyone was moved to repent wholeheartedly. (Quoted in Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

Our Sages teach that one cannot achieve atonement unless he appeases those against whom he

has sinned. Some say that one cannot achieve atonement even for his sins against G-d unless he has properly atoned for his sins against man, and received forgiveness. (Kaf Hachaim 606:3)

Why? Because atoning only for some sins is like immersing only part of one's body in a mikveh. Obviously, one does not attain purity by doing so. (Mussar Hamishnah)

BECAUSE YOM KIPPUR DOES NOT ATONE UNTIL ONE APPEASED HIS NEIGHBOR. ONE SHOULD BE CERTAIN TO RECITE THE FOLLOWING DECLARATION AND PRAYER (PART OF TEFILAH ZAKKAH) WHICH IS PRINTED IN MANY MACHZIROM:

I extend complete forgiveness to everyone who has sinned against me, whether physically or monetarily, or who has gossiped about me or even slandered me; so, too, anyone who has injured me, whether physically or financially, and for any human sins between man and his neighbor - except for money that I wish to claim and that I can recover in accordance with halachah, and except for someone who sins against me and says, 'I will sin against him and he will forgive me' -- except for these, I grant complete forgiveness, and may no person be punished on my account.

"And just as I forgive everyone, so may You grant me favor in every person's eyes so that he will grant me complete forgiveness."

After Yom Kippur . . .

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (one of the foremost teachers of mussar in the second half of the 20th century; died 2005) writes: It is well known that the most dangerous part of a spacecraft's flight is reentry into the earth's atmosphere. If the craft does not enter the atmosphere at precisely the correct angle, it is very likely to burn up.

So, too, the most critical part of our Yom Kippur observance is our reentry into everyday life. Each of us becomes elevated on Yom Kippur to the best of his or her ability. Everyone comes closer to a life filled with spirituality. Hopefully, everyone thinks loftier thoughts on Yom Kippur than he thinks all year long. But Yom Kippur is not meant to be a day that stands in isolation! We are meant to take something from Yom Kippur that will positively affect our avodah / Divine service throughout the coming year. It may be that we strengthen our avodah, raise our avodah to a new level, or abandon some of our previous sins, but something of Yom Kippur must survive when the Holy Day ends. Therefore, when we reenter the atmosphere of the mundane world after Yom Kippur, we must approach that atmosphere at the correct angle. This means not running away from shul and from the Day itself as a child escapes from class the instant the recess bell rings, for if we do, then whatever we have gained on Yom Kippur will "burn up" on reentry.

This warning does not apply to Yom Kippur alone. The Gemara relates that pious men would prepare for one hour before praying and also would remain in shul for an hour after davening. Why? Because if we hurry to take off our tefilin and leave shul immediately after Shemoneh Esrei, we

throw away some or all of the inspiration that we gained from praying. [Although we are not accustomed to remain in shul for a full hour after the weekday Shemoneh Esrei, calmly reciting the various prayers that precede the final kaddish serves the same purpose.] The same thing applies to how we leave Shabbat--are we eager to throw it off, or do we allow the holiness of Shabbat to linger? (Ma'amarei Yemei Ratzon p.105)

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