

COMPLETING THE PROCESS

by Rabbi Moshe Peretz Gilden

"Our Father, our King, inscribe us in the book of Merits." While this entreaty is repeated throughout the period of the Days of Awe, it would appear that inscription into this book would depend on the righteousness of our deeds throughout the year. How can we simply ask to be written into this book?

Rabbi Daniel Movshovitz (1) elucidates that this prayer is recited looking toward the future, requesting we be given opportunities to do good deeds.

The Vilna Gaon (2) explains that the joy we have during the Festival of Succos (3) commemorates the day that the Clouds of Glory returned to surround and protect the Jewish Nation in the desert after they were forgiven for the Sin of the Golden Calf. But if the clouds' return was a sign of forgiveness, why did they come five days after Yom Kippur? It was on Yom Kippur that G-d said, "I forgive!" What additional merit was still needed for the return of the Clouds of Glory?

Rabbeinu Yonah in his classic ethics text Sha'arei Teshuva directs that one who repented from sin should also beseech G-d to erase his misdeeds and desire his return, for it is possible to be completely forgiven such that no punishment will befall him, nevertheless, G-d does not desire his service. One can be cleansed of sin yet G-d will not give him the opportunities to do His will or the strength to carry it out properly. The atonement is not complete until one shows a great desire and yearning to fulfill G-d's will even after he was forgiven. Furthermore, the forgiveness he received is not complete until G-d shows that his service is desirable to Him.

Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon (4) concludes that when G-d said, "I forgive" on Yom Kippur the Jews were happy about being forgiven, but the process was not complete. They were still not sure that G-d cared for their service. Indeed, G-d wanted to test the Children of Israel to determine the magnitude of their desire to do His will. He commanded them to build the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and the Jews reacted with great enthusiasm. Five days later they had all the requisite materials and they began the construction of the Mishkan. This day was the first day of Succos, the day the Clouds of Glory finally returned. The Jews saw that not only were they forgiven, but G-d yearned for their service. The atonement was complete. This was the cause of the great joy experienced then, a joy we still celebrate today.

The message of our brief prayer "Our Father, our King inscribe us in the book of Merits", so often repeated through this season, is we understand that simple forgiveness does not suffice. We yearn

to serve G-d to become close to Him and fortify our G-d consciousness, thus fulfilling our purpose in this world. Until G-d desires our service, the atonement is not complete. We beg G-d to take a step further and merit us with many opportunities to serve Him throughout the year, demonstrating the complete restoration of our relationship with Him.

Have a Good Shabbos! May we all be inscribed and sealed for a year of life and blessing!

(1) Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Yeshiva Bais Hatalmud of Kelm, Lithuania

(2) Rabbi Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman Kramer; 1720-1797; the greatest Torah scholar in many centuries and acknowledged leader of non-Chassidic Jewry

(3) The Festival of the Tabernacle, which starts five days after Yom Kippur (4) Mashgiach Ruchni/Spiritual Mentor of Beth Medrash Govoha, the Yeshiva of Lakewood, New Jersey

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