

RETURNING HOME

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With Passover behind us and the summer about to begin, this Shabbos we will find ourselves reading about Yom Kippur. Our reading this week begins with the special services performed by the High Priest in the Tabernacle and the Holy Temple, including that for Yom Kippur, the annual Day of Atonement.

In truth, there is a very good reason to discuss Yom Kippur and its services now, beyond the halfway point on the calendar between this year's Yom Kippur and the following one. It is a good time to remind ourselves of our desire to do better — and to continue a process we started on that holy day.

We know that after a full day of prayers and fasting on Yom Kippur, G-d grants atonement to us for all our sins. And then, at the close of the holiday, we pray the regular evening service (Ma'ariv) — in which we once again ask forgiveness for our sins! What sins could possibly have been committed during the ten-second break between the Yom Kippur prayers, and the evening prayer?

Rabbi Shimon Schwab zt"l explains that our repentance on Yom Kippur is motivated by fear. That is why we are committing to change, because we have a fear of G-d's Judgment. But committing to change out of fear is only the first step in the process of Teshuvah, returning to G-d and His path. What should follow is a year-long process of return motivated by *love* of G-d, rather than fear.

Rav Schwab cites Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch zt"l, who notes that the word "Kippur" means "covering." On Yom Kippur G-d "covers over" our sins, perhaps like a band-aid, and we are spared the punitive consequences of our actions. This still leaves a distance between us and G-d, a wound created as a result of our sins, which is not repaired on Yom Kippur. After atonement, the job of understanding G-d's greatness in the world, and in our lives, and understanding how distant we are from Him, begins. From that understanding of our distance, we kindle within us the desire to come close to Him motivated by love. It is then that the ultimate repentance can be achieved. After Yom Kippur, the newly-cleansed soul begins this process of returning to G-d out of a sincere love for Him, and therefore we beg for forgiveness anew during the weekday Ma'ariv following Yom Kippur.

So here we are at the close of the month of Nissan, following Passover, reminded of that post-Yom Kippur commitment to forge a new relationship with our Creator — a relationship of love that burns through the whole year. May this reminder renew that desire for closeness to G-d now, for a day of true cleansing less than six months away!

Good Shabbos!