

A CLOSER LOOK

by Torah.org

We are now in the middle of the Ten Days of Repentance, culminating with the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. Rosh Hashanah, which just passed, was the Day of Judgment for the new year. Many have asked a simple, yet compelling question: why shouldn't we first have our day of repentance and atonement, so that we can prepare for judgement properly?

This question can be answered with the help of the following story:

The revered Sa'adyah Gaon was head of the famed academy in Sura, Babylon, over a millennium ago. He once traveled to another city in order to deliver an address. He arrived the previous day, and stayed in a local inn.

After he finished speaking, the innkeeper came rushing over, crying as he apologized to the Rabbi.

"What is the matter, my friend? Why are you crying? How can I help you?" the Gaon pleaded with the broken man.

"I didn't know it was you! Had I only known it was you ..." said the innkeeper, and he cried even louder.

"But you treated me just fine," the Gaon reassured him. "I have no complaints against you or my accommodations!"

"Yes, but had I known who you are, I would have treated you with more respect!"

After his return home, his students found the Gaon himself crying like a child. "My Teacher!" they cried out. "What is wrong?! Why are you crying like that?!"

The Gaon related the story of his encounter with the innkeeper, and added: "I thought I had done *Teshuva* (repented) for my past mistakes, until I learned from the innkeeper that *Teshuva* depends upon *understanding whom we are serving*. Every day my understanding of The Holy One, Blessed is He, grows, and I am crying because today I am more able to appreciate how severe my mistakes have been!" (As told by [Rabbi Pinchos Winston, Perceptions](#))

One of the themes of Rosh Hashanah is accepting G-d as our King. In the Rosh Hashanah prayers, we place Him as King over us, speaking of his greatness and power over all of Creation. After hours spent recognizing His overwhelming authority, we come to a new understanding of His infinite greatness. Without this new appreciation, we would not understand the severity of our sinful actions

that go against His will — and our repentance would fall short.

The more we understand G-d's infinite greatness, the better we understand our obligation to pursue His goodness, and to emulate His kindness. Now is the time to examine our actions, and to see what we can do better in the year ahead — preparing ourselves for the holy day of repentance, Yom Kippur, that lies before us.