

Sparks

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Yom Kippur: The Fast Track to Love and Forgiveness

Yom Kippur is all about love and forgiveness. It's about how we are always inseparably one with G-d. On Yom Kippur we get a glimpse of ourselves, our choices and our relationship to G-d from another perspective — G-d's perspective. This is the transformational power that makes it into a Day of Atonement and forgiveness.

There is a cryptic verse in the Book of Psalms (139:16), which, the Sages say, refers to Yom Kippur:

The days were formed, and one of them is His.

Everyday of the year we see the world from our perspective but, on Yom Kippur we get a glimpse of the way the world looks from G-d's perspective and everything changes in light of that perspective. We see it all from the perspective of the World to Come where you get to see the whole picture.

The Talmud teaches that in this world when something good happens to us, we praise G-d — "Blessed is He Who is good and does good." When something bad happens we must say — "Blessed is He Who is a true Judge." However, in the future we will say - "Blessed is He Who is good and does good," even about the misfortunes in our lives.

In other words, when we will look back and see the whole picture, we will realize that every bad event that happened to us contributed to G-d's plan to bring upon us ultimate goodness. This is also true about every bad act we that we did.

According to Jewish Mysticism, although we have the free choice to do other than G-d's will, G-d is always in control. In other words, even when we can do other than G-d's will we cannot *oppose* His will or undermine His plan.

Therefore, when we have done wrong and are sorry for that, we must realize that no matter what we have done, it can all be recycled back into G-d's plan and contribute to the ultimate good of the world. Of course this does not mean that we can just go ahead and do wrong. The path of transgression removes us from G-d. This distance causes us feelings of alienation and spiritual anguish which may become manifest as physical ailment.

However, if you sincerely regret your wrongdoings and resolve never to do them again then you are forgiven and your past will be recycled and put towards future good.

Yom Kippur is an amazing day of transformation where your darkest deeds from the past turn into light. This is because the light of the World to Come, so to speak, is shining into

our world on this day. You can receive this light and be transformed by it if you plug yourself into the expanded consciousness of Yom Kippur through the proper acts, prayers and thoughts prescribed for the day.

THE DAY OF AT-ONE-MENT

The joyous truth of G-d's oneness is shining bright and clear on Yom Kippur. Torah teaches that G-d is not just the one and only ruling power and there are no other G-ds, but that G-d is absolutely the one and only reality — there is nothing but G-d and we exist within G-d. That does not mean that you and I are the Almighty G-d. However, we are souls — sparks, aspects and expressions of G-d. We do not exist apart from Him but rather within Him.

In other words, as it is explained in Jewish Mysticism, G-d created a space within Himself, so to speak, and created beings other than Himself. This self-imposed limitation is called *Tzimtzum* — the restriction or the withdrawal of divinity. G-d withdraws and limits His endless presence to create a space and a place for beings other than Himself — free beings who can do other than His will.

We exist within G-d similar to the existence of an idea within the mind of its thinker. The difference, however, is that an idea has no free choice. We, however, have free choice but mysteriously any choice we make still remains within the context of G-d and the confines of G-d's will. Therefore, we are free and yet, ironically, G-d is still absolutely in control. We are free to disobey and do other than G-d's will, but we are not able to oppose G-d's will or undermine His plan. This, of course, is a paradox that cannot be comprehended by our rational minds.

What difference, then, do our choices make?

Our real choice is whether to become a conscious partner to G-d in the making of history or an unconscious tool for G-d. We can choose to do G-d's will and contribute to His plan in an active and conscious way, and thereby, experience the ecstasy of the unchangeable truth that G-d is one and we are one with G-d. Or, we can choose to oppose G-d's will and ironically, through our own choices, fulfill G-d's plan without even knowing it. When we do this, however, we deny ourselves the joyous knowledge of our inseparable connection to G-d and instead painfully suffer feelings of alienation and separation from G-d.

We only choose to disobey G-d's will when we mistakenly think that we exist separate and independent from G-d. When we do that, we support and nurture these illusions about ourselves. In essence our wrongdoings are actually our own punishment. They make us feel disconnected, alienated and isolated from G-d, who is actually the ground, context and essence of our very existence.

In other words, our choices create our own heaven or hell.

THE JOY OF REGRET

Unlike Rosh Hashanah, on Yom Kippur I can confess all my sins to G-d with the realization that they too can contribute to His plan. On Yom Kippur, when G-d's oneness is so manifest, the mention of our sins can be a source of greater light. This is not so for Rosh Hashanah — the day of judgment. On Rosh Hashanah I already feel so far away

from G-d because of my wrongdoings; I wouldn't want to even mention a sin and add to my feelings of distance. But on Yom Kippur when G-d's oneness is so revealed and the light of His eternal love for us is shining, don't be afraid. Confess your transgressions even a million times. In fact, be as clear and precise as you can because on Yom Kippur you actually experience greater love precisely from every single wrong you regret you did. Moments of love are the best time to remember the times we wronged each other because when we feel so at one with each other we are able to appreciate how all the conflict of the past, in the end, actually served to enhance our unity. In a funny way conflicts are great for relationships. Once the storm calms and we stop yelling at each other, we suddenly feel so foolish, we then uncontrollably embrace and profusely apologize. In the back of our minds, however, there is this very strange sense of satisfaction and appreciation that this was a great fight. The conflict, alienation and separation that it created actually contributed to a heightened awareness of our true love and eternal oneness. The best time to remember your mistakes and wrongdoings and ask forgiveness of your beloved is in moments of love. The contrast between the bad times that were and the good time that is happening right now generates even greater feelings of love and appreciation. Therefore, the dark conflicts of the past when viewed in the present light of love actually serve to intensify the brilliance and warmth of the moment. Yom Kippur reveals the truth that G-d's love forever shines upon us. It is only our foolish attitudes and wrongdoings that have blocked out the light creating the dark shadows in our life. As the prophet Isaiah said in the name of G-d, "It is only your wrongdoings that separates you and Me." On Yom Kippur, the timeless truth of G-d's oneness and our oneness with G-d is bright and clear. So on Yom Kippur let it rip. Remember every dumb and wrong thing you ever did that seemed to separate you from G-d because on Yom Kippur it only adds to the ecstasy of love and the joy of forgiveness. G-d allows us to make mistakes and do wrong because He knows that eventually the painful feelings of alienation will increase and enhance the ecstasy of our love.

FEELING ONE-DERFUL

The purpose of a mitzvah is to promote G-d's oneness and our oneness with G-d. Sins, on the other hand, promote separateness and create feelings of conflict and alienation. But when the separateness is recycled to promote the oneness, then really what you have is a mitzvah. Therefore, your sins can be converted into the value of mitzvot. This can happen only when your penitence is motivated by your love for G-d and your desire to experience G-d's oneness and your oneness with G-d.

Penitence motivated by fear of punishment does not accomplish this transformation. Penitence out of fear is based on the perspective that I exist separate and independent of G-d, I am here on earth and G-d is over there in heaven and I should not act against G-d's will for fear of punishment. Penitence from fear cancels out the negative effects of sins but it cannot transform them into the positive force of mitzvos.

THE FAST TRACK TO ONENESS

The Talmud teaches that in the World to Come we do not eat or drink, we are simply satiated by our feelings of closeness to G-d. On Yom Kippur, because we are basking in the light of the World to Come we too are satiated by our intimate experience with G-d. When the light of G-d's oneness is shining we do not want our bodies to create shadows. It is the body that promotes the illusion that we exist independent and separate from G-d. Our bodies suggest that we exist in this sack of skin separate from the rest of existence. Therefore we fast, we do not feed our bodies, nor do we even relate to our bodies on Yom

Kippur. We abstain not only from eating and drinking but also from all bodily pleasures — sexual relations, washing and anointing ourselves with any types of skin cream.

We also don't wear leather shoes on this day because they represent the body, which we do not want to relate to on Yom Kippur.

When Moses approached the burning bush G-d told him to take off his shoes, which also metaphorically meant to take off his body. The shoe to the body is like the body to the soul. Not wearing leather shoes on Yom Kippur is an external act that reflects an internal state of being.

On Yom Kippur I disassociate myself, for one day, from my body so that my body does not separate me from immersing into the *mikvah* of G-d's oneness. In this way I acknowledge the truth of how I exist within G-d. I am one with Him and I am loved by Him with the very love that He loves Himself because I am an aspect of His very Self. Yom Kippur offers the perfect ambiance to return to G-d in love, redeem your dark past and turn it into light. On Yom Kippur we realize that only love is real; everything else is illusion.

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