

Sparks

by Rabbi David Aaron
*Founder and Dean, Isralight
Rosh Yeshiva, Orayta*

Getting the Forgiveness You Want

Yom Kippur Secrets

About Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement, the Torah tells us “the very day atones.” In fact, there are certain categories of misdeeds that are only atoned for on Yom Kippur.

Let’s say you committed one of those offenses, but you regretted what you did. You decided, “I don’t want to do this again. I am sorry that I did it. And I promise that I will never do it again.” Even though this constitutes true regret, atonement and reparation happens only on Yom Kippur. There’s something metaphysical about the day of Yom Kippur that purifies and rectifies the past. There are certain transgressions that cannot be completely fixed or atoned for until you step into the day of Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur is a *mikvah* in time. When you immerse in a *mikvah*—a purifying ritual bath—there can be absolutely nothing between your skin and the water, according to Jewish law. Before immersing in the *mikvah*, you have to scrutinize yourself to ensure that nothing at all separates you from the *mikvah* waters. Even if you have a loose hair sticking to your skin, the immersion is not considered total.

The waters of the *mikvah* represent the oneness of G-d. When you enter into a *mikvah*, you are immersing yourself back into G-d’s all encompassing oneness, simulating the experience of existing within G-d. For this to work there must be absolutely no separation between you and G-d.

In the *mikvah*, you are one with its waters, completely absorbed, submerged and surrounded. By immersing your body in the *mikvah*, you express your desire to merge your soul back into the oneness of G-d. You acknowledge that He is your context, ground, and essence and nothing at all separates you from Him. Thus, you become pure again—physically and spiritually.

The status of impurity is simply the manifestation of our separateness from G-d caused by our wrongdoings. We wouldn’t choose to do other than G-d’s will, unless we were under the illusion that we exist separate and independent of Him. This attitude—and the choices we make based on it—creates the spiritual status called *tumah*, “impurity.” On the other hand, *tahara*, “purity,” is about dissolving that separation and returning to the awareness of G-d’s all embracing oneness and our oneness with G-d. We can achieve this state of purity through the *mikvah*.

On Rosh Hashanah, G-d is perceived as if He is over there, and we are over here. G-d is the King, and we are neither G-d nor King. G-d is the Judge, and we are the judged. We feel fear, and we

feel far. However, on Yom Kippur, G-d is our place, space, context and essence. Even though we recognize that we and G-d are clearly not one and the same, we are completely one with G-d. He is our *mikvah* and not even a hair separates us. On Yom Kippur, we know that G-d is one, and we exist within G-d completely absorbed, submerged and surrounded by His being. We feel close, and we feel loved.

It is customary on the day before Yom Kippur to immerse oneself in a *mikvah* in preparation for experiencing the day as a *mikvah* in time, when we can truly experience how we are actually always immersed in G-d.

The Holy of Holies

Yom Kippur is the only day of the year when the High Priest, while performing the sacrificial service, entered the innermost chamber in the Temple. This chamber was called the Holy of Holies (the one holy that includes the many holies) because the truth of G-d's oneness—the One who includes the many—was manifest there.

The High Priest had to be completely pure when he walked into that chamber. If he were physically or spiritually impure (if he thought and acted as if he was an independent, self-contained being, existing separate from G-d), then he immediately died upon entering the Holy of Holies. The truth revealed in the Holy of Holies would simply obliterate his false premise of independent/separate existence, causing his death.

If, however, he safely entered the Holy of Holies, he then pronounced the name of G-d *YHVH* (the Tetragrammaton) which is forbidden to anyone else at any other time. The entire Temple would then be filled with the truth of G-d's all-inclusive oneness. The massive crowd of people tightly packed into the Temple then bowed down, and each person miraculously had plenty of space to do so. In other words, the truth of G-d's oneness manifest on Yom Kippur transcended the limits of space and revealed how the one can hold the many.

That the one can hold the many is an astonishing truth, which we have since forgotten.

The Baal Shem Tov, the 18th century founder of the Chassidic Movement, was once traveling in a wagon that was packed full with passengers. Even though there was no place to move, when he saw a hitchhiker on the road, he nonetheless urged the driver to stop and offer the fellow a ride. "But there's no more room for anybody else," responded the driver. "What are you talking about?" said the Baal Shem Tov. "All we need to do is love each other just a little bit more, and there will be plenty of room."

G-d's oneness is the miraculous power of love. It transcends the limits of time and space. It includes everyone and everything within it. On Yom Kippur the light of G-d's love for us is bright and clear.

The Fast Track to Oneness

The Talmud teaches that in the World to Come we will neither eat nor drink, we will simply be satiated by our feelings of closeness to G-d. On Yom Kippur we are basking in the light of the World to

Come and we, too, are satiated by our intimate connection with G-d. This is the deeper reason why we don't eat that day.

When the light of G-d's love and 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; it suggests 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 from all bodily pleasures—sexual relations, washing, or applying any types of lotions or creams.

We also don't wear leather shoes on this day. In today's day and age, not wearing leather shoes on Yom Kippur could not be a matter of luxury or comfort, because there are also non-leather shoes that are just as expensive and just as comfortable. But leather shoes—made from animal hides—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, we disassociate ourselves, for one day, from our bodies so that they do not separate us from immersing into the *mikvah* of G-d's oneness. In this way, we acknowledge that we exist within G-d.

We say: "I am one with Him, and I am loved by Him with the very love that He loves Himself, because I am an expression of His very self."

On Yom Kippur, we celebrate forgiveness, because we realize that only love is real—everything else is illusion.

Rabbi David Aaron

Author of *Endless Light, Seeing G-d, The Secret Life of G-d, Inviting G-d In, Living A Joyous Life, The G-d-Powered Life, and Tefillah Training*