

Staying Connected

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As the sun begins to set, the Torah scrolls are removed from the Holy Ark. They are held close to the heart as the *chazan*, dressed in white and bedecked with a *tallit*, begins the famous chant, “*Kol Nidrei, v’esarei, u’shevu’ei, vacharamei...*” Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year, is upon us. We will pray five prayer services and abstain from food, drink, washing or anointing our bodies, wearing leather footwear, and marital relations. On this day, we rise to the awesome spiritual level of the angels.

Rebbe Nachman describes two methods of serving God. The first is called *baki b'ayil*, describing one who is an expert in ascending to serve God on ever-elevated levels of worship. No matter the spiritual heights he has reached, he understands that God is infinitely greater, and continually aspires to rise ever higher.

The second way of serving God is called *baki b'nafek*, referring to one who is capable of serving God in mundane affairs, or when he feels far removed from Him. No matter how great the spiritual distance between him and God, he is capable of connecting to God even on that level.

In large part, Yom Kippur belongs to the category of *baki b'ayil*. Our minds, prayers and even physical bodies are focused entirely on the spiritual realm. Throughout the day, we push ourselves to say yet another prayer, to concentrate a bit more and to remain focused on this day's special sanctity. But if this is so, the Torah reading for Yom Kippur seems completely out of place.

It begins, "And God spoke to Moses after the death of Aaron's two sons, when they drew near before the Lord, and they died" (Leviticus 16:1). The Torah seems to imply that they passed away because they drew *too* close to God. But is that not the essence of Yom Kippur? Is Yom Kippur not the day when the Kohen Gadol would enter the Holy of Holies, when every Jew rises to his ultimate level of sanctity?

During the Mussaf prayers, we retell the Kohen Gadol's Yom Kippur service. The Kohen Gadol would enter and exit the Holy of Holies five times, changing his clothing each time. Even though the Temple is considered a place of *baki b'ayil*, nevertheless, for the Kohen Gadol himself, these were great variations. When he would exit the exalted place of the Holy of Holies to enter the Inner Courtyard or the *Heichal*, and perform the various services there and then return, he would constantly be drawing closer or further away from God. The

purpose in all of this was for him to perfect *teshuvah* (returning). By serving God in this way, he was elevating every place and every possible situation, and demonstrating that we can access God from anywhere. At any moment, whether we are living in the “Holy of Holies” or we have moved away from it, we can always connect to God.

This was the mistake of Aaron’s two sons. They wanted to serve God with awesome closeness, but hadn’t yet perfected their ability to serve Him even in mundane life or in situations where they felt distanced from Him. Therefore the Torah continues, “With this shall Aaron enter the Holy” (ibid., 16:3), describing the various enterings and exitings of the Holy of Holies during the Kohen Gadol’s Yom Kipper service.

Yom Kippur is the ultimate day of *teshuvah*. It’s not about pretending to be a perfect saint, but about truly repairing our spiritual gaps. The essence of our *teshuvah* isn’t as much about what we’ve done wrong as it is about what we will fix in the upcoming year. As we stand in the synagogue wearing our pure, white clothing, let us be worthy of real change – not only by serving God on this exalted day but, more importantly, by remembering Him throughout the ups and downs of daily life.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhhot Shabbat 7