

Why Do We Sin?

written by Yossi Katz

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Yes, it's that time of year again. Elul is upon us, and considering that we are seriously aspiring to engage in *teshuvah* (return to God), it may be high time to ask this fundamental question.

You're probably thinking the simple answer is that we sin because we just don't care, or at least we lack sufficient interest to do what the Torah deems proper. Wrong!

Shockingly, Reb Noson says that the majority of our wrongdoing actually comes about because we want too much, not too little.

Before God created our world, His Infinite Light filled all of existence. But God desired to make room for us and our freedom of choice. Therefore He created an Empty Space (so to speak), which gave us the room to "co-exist." This Empty Space allowed His Kingship to be affirmed even where He was most hidden – thus bringing about the ultimate manifestation of His greatness.

Each of us is considered a unique universe. Our personal

“creation” includes both the Infinite Light and the Empty Space. The Infinite Light is our burning inner-desire to cleave to spirituality. We naturally demand perfection in our service of God. We believe we must perform acts of kindness or study Torah flawlessly. The desire to jump into a mitzvah or a new resolution and complete it with gusto stems from the force of our burning inner-desire.

But what starts as a noble enterprise often ends in failure. We intend to do some good deed, but invest too much of ourselves in it and end up feeling burnt out. Or the opposite—we desire to serve God with such perfection that we give up before we even try. We often feel a lack of interest in spiritual pursuits because we’ve set the bar too high, leading to the conclusion, “Why bother?” Then our potential energy gets misdirected and leads us to sin and to desire illicit things. Yes, we do have to burn with passion and desire to cleave to God, but this energy must be channeled the right way. How do we do that?

We must create an Empty Space within ourselves. An Empty Space is an inner-filtration system, a “cooling-off” place in which we can mitigate our burning, holy desire and harness its energy for good. An Empty Space allows us to grow step by step, with the patience necessary to endure a lasting, positive *teshuvah*.

As always, our guides in this endeavor are the Tzaddikim. The Torah illuminates everything, but not always do we understand its directives. Sometimes we focus on the wrong parts and take Torah teachings the wrong way. Therefore, Reb Noson compares God’s Torah to the Infinite Light. We need the Tzaddikim to “filter” the Torah’s messages to us, showing us the right way to follow it. The Tzaddikim can also teach us how to serve God with our burning inner-desire, while filtering our energy in a positive and efficient way.

As our *parashah* says, “You should not divert from the word

they [the Tzaddikim] tell you, either right or left” (Deuteronomy 17:11). “Right” means rushing to do what is perceived as righteous and holy. “Left” means doing less than required, slacking off.

It’s a delicate balance, but one that is crucial for our spiritual success. By growing in a measured way, we emulate the ultimate purpose of Creation. We aren’t serving God while being blinded by His Infinite Light and lacking free will. Rather, we’re enduring the filters of life’s challenges and growing pains to reveal that all of Creation, including the necessary “breathing room,” attests to His sovereignty.

As we begin to prepare for Rosh HaShanah and the coronation of the King, may we begin to truly see His loving hand in every detail of our lives. Amen.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhhot Nedarim 3

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