Asking for forgiveness after Yom Kippur

Neilah 5778

Why do we ask for forgiveness after we were forgiven? That is the question I would like to ask you and myself tonight. We are about to end Yom Kippur. The prayer of Neilah, the fifth prayer of the day, is our last chance to repent before the doors in heaven close. We have been praying for days asking God for forgiveness and I assume that most of us are feeling confident that with all the Teshuva, the davening and the Tzedakah we gave in the last few days God forgave our mistakes. But immediately after finishing *Neilah* we will pray our daily *Maariv* where in the Amidah we will say once again: *"Pardon us, our Father, for we have sinned; forgive us, our King, for we have transgressed; for You are a good and forgiving G-d. Blessed are You Lord, gracious One who pardons abundantly."* So the question is, why do we ask for forgiveness immediately after Yom Kippur is over? Who had time to sin in just a few minutes or even seconds?

How many times when you wanted to prove your point that you were right, and the other person accepted your argument the first time, did you just continue to argue and yell because you were so committed with your own thoughts? Maybe this is similar, maybe we continue to ask for forgiveness because we can't simply "stop". It's like running a marathon and stopping as soon as you reach the final tape. You can't simply stop! You need to start reducing your speed little by little. You can't simply stop!

Other rabbis suggest that we always "have time" to sin between Neilah and Maariv. I'm not exactly sure how, or what, but it is a possibility that we cannot discard.

I personally believe that the reason is much more simple (and meaningful at the same time). This is just the language of our daily Amidah which our Sages instituted and we are not supposed to change the blessings or uproot any of them. Every day of the year, despite the day of the calendar, we ask for forgiveness, praising Hashem for being a forgiving God. In the same way that every day we thank Hashem for giving us intelligence, for accepting our Teshuvah, for redeeming and healing our people, for blessing our work, for gathering the

exiles, for the sake of our leaders and for the sake of justice. We also thank Hashem for being a forgiving God because we know that we are going to sin during the year to come. Maybe we didn't do anything wrong in the last couple of minutes, but the only thing that we can be sure of when Yom Kippur ends, is that next year we will have many things to confess and say "I'm sorry" for.

This blessing in the Amidah just minutes after Yom Kippur ends is a reminder of our human condition. It's a reminder that doesn't matter how many times we ask for forgiveness, we will err again. It´s a reminder that we shouldn´t have to have naive hopes. But we should not lose hope either. Hashem knows that we are going to make mistakes and that is why we have a Yom Kippur every year. And I believe he is O.K with that and that is why He gave us this gift called Yom Kippur. The only thing He hopes is that each year our mistakes would be different than the previous years.

During Maariv, pay attention to the Amidah. Each one of the 19 blessings of the Amidah is in present tense. Not in the past, not in the future but in present tense. Why is that? Because the Amidah is not a declaration of what already happened in the past but what will happen, God willing, in the future. But we are so confident of that future that we speak in present tense. We did not yet commit any mistakes (I hope so) but we are confident that we will. We must not distress or despair because of this; but rather we must accept our human condition and the gift of God to be able to atone for our mistakes year after year.

"Pardon us, our Father, for we have sinned; forgive us, our King, for we have transgressed; for You are a good and forgiving G-d. Blessed are You Lord, gracious One who pardons abundantly." is the daily blessing, which reminds us all year round about Yom Kippur. After Yom Kippur has ended we repeat this phrase to remind us that Yom Kippur is just once a year but God is willing to forgive every day of the year.

Gmar Chatima Tovah!