

For on this day He shall provide atonement for you to cleanse yourself; from all your sins before Hashem shall you be cleansed. (16:30)

In *Pachad Yitzchak*, *Yom Kippur* 1, *Horav Yitzchak Hutner*, zl, cites *Rabbeinu Yonah* (*Shaar* 2:14) who writes: “It is a positive *mitzvah* of the Torah for a person to awaken his spirit to return/perform *teshuvah* on *Yom Kippur*.” He quotes the above *pasuk* which intimates that it is a specific *mitzvah* to perform *teshuvah* on *Yom Kippur* (exclusive of the *mitzvah* to repent from one’s sins at all times). The *Rosh Yeshivah* wonders wherein lies the difference between *teshuvah* all year and *teshuvah* on *Yom Kippur*. He explains that the *mitzvah* to repent all year/all of the time, whenever one sins, is derived from the *pasuk* (*Devarim* 30:2), *V’shavta ad Hashem Elokecha*, “And you will return unto Hashem, your G-d,” while the *teshuvah* of *Yom Kippur* is derived from the above *pasuk*, *lifnei Hashem titharu*, “Before Hashem shall you be cleansed/purified.” Apparently, a difference exists between “standard” *teshuvah* and *taharah*.

Sforno explains that complete purity and forgiveness are possible only before Hashem, for only Hashem knows the sincerity of an individual’s *teshuvah*. *Yom Kippur* is when the one who repents receives his certificate of *taharah*, purification. *Horav Gedaliah Schorr*, zl, derives from the *pasuk* that the removal of sin is comprised of two distinct aspects: atonement and cleansing. Committing a sin leaves a stain on one’s soul/spiritual persona that he must cleanse. One who sins earns a punishment for disobedience. In addition, he is now more likely to sin again, since his spiritual resistance has weakened. Atonement removes the punishment liability; yet, the individual has not yet expunged the noxious effect of the sin on the soul. Enter *teshuvah* on *Yom Kippur*, a day of intense prayer and physical affliction, the time at which Hashem will vacate the sin of one whose repentance is the product of a sincere heart, and purify his soul.

Perhaps, we may expand on the distinction between *teshuvah* and *taharah*. *Teshuvah* is the process in which the sinner returns to Hashem by rectifying his actions, thoughts and emotions. It is a personal journey of rectification, regret, and a commitment to better oneself. *Teshuvah* also includes working to close the gap in his relationship with Hashem which he breached through his errant behavior. Thus, *teshuvah* is about our relationship with Hashem. Our actions have distanced us from Him; *Teshuvah* helps us to return.

Taharah is about cleansing one’s soul from the effects of sin. While *teshuvah* repairs his relationship with Hashem, *taharah* is the spiritual purification that allows one to regain his inner sanctity. Hashem welcomes us home once we repent, but why would one want to “sit at the table with soiled garments”? *Taharah* effects the cleansing; it completes the job. *Yom Kippur* is the day of atonement/*teshuvah*, as well as the day of *taharah*, when we restore our spiritual purity.