

After the Sin: Hashem's Role in Teshuva

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As time continues its inexorable forward march, and leave the *yamim tovim* behind, we are left to ponder the personal journey that we are just now completing. Oftentimes, we associate a successful process of *teshuva* with the metaphor of a blank slate. We imagine that if our failings are like unwanted markings on the whiteboard of our spiritual lives, the Almighty takes his heavenly eraser and wipes away the stains. While there is much imagery in our tradition to recommend this conception, I believe it does not do complete justice to the absolutely breathtaking compassion with which our Heavenly Father grants atonement.

Shabbat Bereishit, as it immediately follows the last of our festivals, casts familiar episodes of sin, punishment, and expiation in a meaningful new light. When Adam and Eve eat of the forbidden fruit, we are told that they experienced a new kind of self-awareness, and understood that they were indeed completely naked. It is an unpleasant realization. Whereas the Torah tells us explicitly that their nudity had not been a source of shame for Adam and Eve prior to their sin, Adam is now afraid of his nakedness, and both he and his wife immediately fashion loincloths to ameliorate their discomfort.

As we know, Adam and Eve are punished severely for their transgression. The human condition is irrevocably altered, with the introduction of the phenomena of pain, economic hardship, and of course, death itself. Adam and Eve are ejected from the Garden, yet not before God makes a stunning gesture of atonement and healing.

וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לְאָדָם וּלְאִשְׁתּוֹ, כְּתָנוּת עוֹר וַיְלַבְּשֵׁם

‘And Hashem Elokim made Adam and his wife garments for their skin, and clothed them.’

We must recall that Adam and Eve were only troubled by their nakedness because of their sin. If Hashem were merely ‘wiping the spiritual slate clean’, He could evict Adam and Eve from the Garden and allow them to contend with their nakedness themselves, as they had begun to do by fashioning rudimentary loincloths. Yet, by providing proper clothing for Adam and Eve, Hashem plunges into the breach and addresses the terrible shame that Adam and Eve were feeling in their nakedness, pain which they had, in fact, brought upon themselves. Hashem is not merely prepared to offer forgiveness; He is acting as healer.

As we leave the *yamim tovim* behind, we should be secure in the knowledge that Hashem is not merely prepared to wipe our slates clean. Whatever pain our own shortcomings have caused us, however deeply we have wounded ourselves, we must know that Hashem is prepared to act to heal even those self-inflicted wounds. As he did at the very dawn of time for Adam and Chava, He will envelop us in the gentle warmth of the garments, literal and figurative, He fashions for all of us, so that we should not be ashamed.