

Asking Forgiveness From Hashem

Saying Slichah, or asking forgiveness from Hashem, involves some of the most basic aspects of the way we approach God in Torah life. I'll talk a few minutes about the way I understand some of them.

First, asking forgiveness of Hashem means addressing Hashem in personal terms, as one would address another human being. Since God is infinitely Other, it seems to me that there are in principle an infinite number of ways that we could address Him. I think that addressing Hashem in personal terms reveals one aspect or one face of God that is particularly important for human beings.

Now, this important face of Hashem is not revealed by addressing God personally in some theoretical way, but in actually praying to, speaking to, God personally. For me, this involves imagination. When I ask Hashem for forgiveness, I need to imagine Who God is, as it were, and why I'm asking Her for forgiveness. The way I imagine God is partially idiosyncratic and partially based on a principled theology. I'd like to share some of what I imagine.

First, on the more personal idiosyncratic side, if I am to address God as person, I find it easier to address God in the feminine. But even so, the question is: what kind of person, as it were, is She? I imagine Her to be sort of a super-person: a personality consisting of all the human characteristics that I love and admire, but none of the failings which make human beings human. And perhaps even more importantly, She not only created me once and creates me now, She remains intimately involved in my life. And from that intimacy with Her I derive meaning, value and guidance.

Now Hashem not only seeks this intimacy, She gave us Torah and Mitsvot in order to achieve it. This She says herself:

למען תזכרו ועשיתם את כל מצוותי והייתם קדושים לאלוקיכם

So that you should remember and do all my Commandments

and Be Holy – or Betrothed - to Me

Now its here, among many other places, that I fail. I often don't remember and don't do all Her Commandments. The Source of All Life, The God of Israel, seeks *my* presence so as to fill *my* life with meaning and with value, and She sets before me a path which leads straight to Her. And I start down the path, and then I lose interest, usually in favor of some trivial or even destructive distraction. Basically, She was there and I didn't show. I flaked out, again. And then, when I manage to gather enough focus to seek Her face again, I ask for forgiveness.

In so far as we're talking about **בין אדם למקום**, between humanity and God, that's what I'm asking forgiveness for during the Slichot. And we say them now, before the **ימים נוראים**, because this is our opportunity to begin again, to remember, and to walk the path which leads to Hashem.

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