YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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[**The Service of Motza’ei Yom Kippur**](https://etzion.org.il/en/service-motza%E2%80%99ei-yom-kippur)

**Rav Nechemia Raanan**

Translated by David Strauss

The *Musar* writers draw our attention to an unexpected topic: the service of Motza'ei Yom Kippur. For example, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Chasman writes:

A great principle was laid down by the Musar Sages – one which must be known when one stands before God on Yom Kippur – namely, that Yom Kippur begins after Yom Kippur! … That is to say, that the main work – to keep, to do and to fulfill the promises and decisions that a person made on Yom Kippur, to truly return to Him – this most certainly comes after Yom Kippur! … If a person wishes to know whether he experienced Yom Kippur, or not (God forbid), he should contemplate his actions after Yom Kippur: If his behavior has improved, good, and if not, God forbid, sin immediately crouches at the door (*Bereishit* 4:7), as before. If so, what kind of Yom Kippur was this? It was already related in the name of the our master, R. Yitzchak Blazer: This is the sign in the hands of every person. If he truly repented and his sins were pardoned, his heart and soul were purified and he turned into a righteous person! And a person who is clean of sin does not desire evil… As they said (*Avot* 4:2): "One *mitzva* draws in its train another *mitzva*, and one transgression draws in its train another transgression." (*Or Yahel*, Jerusalem 2001, vol. I, p. 390)

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe illustrated the danger of the transition from Yom Kippur to the day that follows with the following parable:

The most dangerous stage in a space flight is the return to the earth's atmosphere. If the spacecraft does not enter it at the precise angle, it may burst into flames because of the intensity of the abrasion in the air. Similarly, the most dangerous stage of Yom Kippur is the return to one's ordinary life. Surely, every person rose up on the Holy Day in accordance with his strengths, drawing close to spirituality and arousing noble thoughts and feelings, much loftier than those thought and felt over the course of the year. But Yom Kippur is not a day unto itself: Its goal is that we should take of its light with us into the year, a strengthening of our service, an ascent to a higher form of service, abandoning our sins. But now, on Motza'ei Yom Kippur, when we return to the "atmosphere" of ordinary days, all of Yom Kippur is liable to be burnt by the strong abrasion of the mundane air. It is a high level of worship to know how to re-enter the atmosphere at "the right angle."

The same is true of Shabbat: The *mitzva* of "Remember the Sabbath day" includes *Kiddush* on Friday night and *Havdala* on Motza'ei Shabbat.[[1]](#footnote-1) So too one must know at one "angle" to return from Shabbat into the "atmosphere"! (*Ma'amarei Yemei ha-Ratzon*, Jerusalem 2005, p. 105)

Rabbi Wolbe cites the following in the name of the Saba of Kelm:

And the holy Saba of Kelm established a great principle in the worship of God, that with the same measure of effort that one ascended toward an elevated level, one must go back down from that elevation and return to one's normal course of life. (ibid.)

Rabbi Eizik Sher, the head of the Slobodka Yeshiva, based the need to prepare for the "day after" on the practice of the "pious men of old":

We learned in tractate *Berakhot* (30b): "One should not stand up to recite the prayer except in a reverent frame of mind. The pious men of old used to wait an hour before praying in order that they might concentrate their thoughts upon their Father in heaven." And in the Gemara there (32a) it says: "Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi also said: One who recites the prayer should also wait an hour after his prayer."

We must consider the purpose for which those pious men waited after their prayers. Granted, they waited before praying "in order that they might concentrate their thoughts upon their Father in heaven" (in the words of the *Tanna*). But what was the purpose of waiting after praying? The classic approach in explaining this is the understanding that those pious men had risen to the upper worlds with their prayers and their wait beforehand, and now after having prayed, they had to descend back to the lower world. Since it is not humanly possible to descend in one continuous journey from the heights of heaven to the lower world (as this is a tremendous fall that causes a great loss to the person and his soul), they would wait an hour after praying in order to retreat step by step and descend little by little from the lofty level which they had reached through their prayers. (*Leket Sichot Musar*, 1993 edition, vol. II, p. 121)

Rabbi Eizik Sher further elaborates on the meaning of the pious men's contemplation after praying:

But we still must consider what the pious men did during this hour. For regarding the first hour before they prayed, when they were struggling to ascend higher and higher, we understand that they spent the time reciting *Pesukei de-Zimra* calmly and slowly in the manner that one counts money (see *Shulchan Arukh*, OC 51:8), and then the blessings of *Keriat Shema* and *Keriat Shema* itself, all of which comprise the ladder by which one ascends heavenward to stand before God with the *Shemoneh Esreh* prayer. But as for the hour after praying, even if in order to descend, it is necessary to go down slowly step by step, it is difficult to imagine what they did during this hour. We are forced to say and to understand that in that hour they would contemplate the spiritual matters that are found in the material world, that is to say, the practical fulfillment of the *mitzvot*, which they were prepared to perform all day. They would contemplate this so that whatever they did all day long would be according to wisdom and knowledge and Divine understanding in material disguise. After all, this is all of man, that in every aspect of his life, the "image of God" in him should find perfect expression. Since those pious men reached in their hour of prayer the level of ridding themselves of their material nature while standing before God in song and blessing, in prayer and supplication, therefore when they removed themselves from before God and finished their prayers, it was their task to dress these separate intellects in material garb, so that they be prepared to serve God in this world through the actual fulfillment of the *mitzvot* and doing of kindness with their bodies. (ibid., pp. 121-122)

Rabbi Eizik takes the idea of waiting after prayer and applies it to the manner in which one should remove oneself from the elevated state that he had reached on Yom Kippur:

In the same way we must seize this practice when we remove ourselves from the Yom Kippur service. For on this holy day we stood at the level of angels, apart from the material affairs of this world, as we find that *Chazal* said: "Samael (Satan) saw that no sin was found in them on Yom Kippur. So he said before Him: Master of the universe, You have one people on earth who are like the ministering angels in heaven. Just as the ministering angels do not have joints, so the people of Israel stand on their feet on Yom Kippur (that is to say: Just as the angels lack knees which would allow them to bend their legs, a metaphor for the fact that they have no rest from doing the will of their Master, because they are active intellects at all times, so the people of Israel appear as they cleave to God on Yom Kippur). Just as the ministering angels do not eat or drink, so the people of Israel do not eat or drink on Yom Kippur. Just as the ministering angels are clean of all sin, so the people of Israel are clean of all sin on Yom Kippur. Just as peace prevails among the ministering angels, so peace prevails among the people of Israel on Yom Kippur" (*Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, chap. 46; see also *Yoma* 20a: "the *Satan* on Yom Kippur has no permission to accuse"). Thus it is explicitly stated that on Yom Kippur we are on the level of the angels, separated from the materialism of this world. [Therefore, we also perform certain actions that are similar to those of the angels, as is explained in the *Shulchan Arukh*, *Orach Chayyim* [610:4] in the Rema: "There are those who are accustomed to wear clean white garments on Yom Kippur, in imitation of the ministering angels." And similarly there (619:2): "On the night of Yom Kippur and on the next day we say: 'Blessed is the name of the glory of His kingdom forever and ever' out loud," and the *Mishna Berura* (no. 8) writes: "because this is the song of the angels, and on Yom Kippur the people of Israel are similar to the angels."] Since on the day after Yom Kippur we must actually occupy ourselves with the *mitzvot* which are the spiritual elements in the material world, we must dedicate proper contemplation to the matter, so that our occupation with the *mitzvot* will be like the occupation of angels in material bodies, who perform every action with clear and refined wisdom and understanding. Just as the pious men of old when they removed themselves from before God would spend an hour in contemplation in order to dress the separate intellects in the materialism of the body, so that they be prepared to serve God in the world of action, so we are obligated when we remove ourselves from before God, from the Yom Kippur service, to spend an hour in serious contemplation so that we can once again occupy ourselves in the actual performance of the *mitzvot* in the correct and proper manner. (ibid.)

In order to temper the transition from Yom Kippur to the next day, Rabbi Sher recommends that we contemplate the *mitzvot* and the goals that are imposed upon each person after Yom Kippur, from the spiritual perspective that one has acquired over the course of Yom Kippur.

In the continuation of his discussion, Rabbi Wolbe relates to another point that may help us preserve the illumination of Yom Kippur for the rest of the year:

All of our success in spirituality over the course of the year depends on the fact that we succeed in drawing Yom Kippur into the entire year in certain aspects. Just as our Rabbis in fact instituted "Yom Kippur Katan" every month, in remembrance of the great Yom Kippur. (*Ma'amarei Yemei ha-Ratzon*, Jerusalem 2005, p. 106)

Aside from the service that is required on Motza'ei Yom Kippur, one must dedicate times over the course of the year to recollect the illumination of Yom Kippur. In continuation of this idea, Rabbi Wolbe mentions the measure that was instituted by the Saba of Kelm:

The holy Saba of Kelm established a special practice for his disciples to perform a certain action or establish a certain permanency for the purpose of continuing Yom Kippur. That is to say, to always have in mind when he performs that action or studies that order that it should be in fulfillment of what he had accepted upon himself on Yom Kippur. (ibid.)

Rabbi Wolbe ends the discussion with the following comments:

Let us be steadfast to observe: "The upright shall dwell in Your presence" (*Tehilim* 140:14), and not allow that which each one of us achieved on the Holy Day to become lost, God forbid, in the encounter with ordinary days! Let each person counsel himself how to keep the dimension of Yom Kippur alive throughout the year, and let this lead to great success. (ibid.)

*Gemar Chatima Tova*.

1. See the Rambam's *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, positive commandment 155; *Sefer ha-Chinukh*, commandment 31, and *Minchat Chinukh*, ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)