

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk** 

TELL IT LIKE IT IS

Yom Kippur

One of the most fascinating aspects of the Teshuva season we find ourselves in, is that when you check the Rambam's Laws of Repentance you find the following intro: There is one positive Torah Mitzva - and it is that one who sins should repent from the sin before God and confess. This statement initiated massive debates about whether or not Rambam considered the Teshuva process itself to be an independent Mitzva or a merely a necessary step within the confession process. So, what is so crucial about the confession? And, how should we accomplish or fulfill this command?

Rav Soloveitchik invested much intellectual effort into understanding the Rambam's Laws of Repentance over many years, and he discussed this very point. He concluded that 'Repentance contemplated and not verbalized is valueless' (On Repentance, p. 92). Clearly, we should never look at our VIDUI (confession) declarations as a mere pro forma ceremony. No, indeed,

these statements must be thought through very carefully and professed sincerely.

The Rav added: There are many things a man knows and thinks about which he does not dare to bring to his lips. Man is stubborn by nature and builds fences within himself, sometimes refusing to acknowledge facts that are unfavorable or unpleasant to us... To know is one thing, but to confirm it through verbal expression is something else entirely... God instilled in man a mechanism of self-defense which enables him to ignore facts, to flee from reality, to deny its existence and to avoid seeing things as they are (p. 93).

So, we are commanded to follow the example of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur who ultimately approaches the goat which will be sent out to the wilderness, and declares: ANA, I beseech You, HASHEM, they have sinned through error (CHATU), they have sinned knowingly (AVU) and they have sinned rebelliously (PASHU) before You, Your nation the House of Yisrael. I beseech You (ANA) through the Holy Name (the second HASHEM in the 13 Attributes) forgive, please, the errors, iniquities and rebellious acts which they have erred, sinned and rebelled against You, the whole nation of Yisrael. As it

declares in the Torah of Moshe Your servant, from Your glorious declaration, 'That on this very day He will atone for you to purify you from all your sins; before HASHEM you will be purified (Vayikra 17:30).

This is, of course, one of the prominent times when the KOHEN GADOL stated clearly the Ineffable name, and the entire community bowed on the stones of the Beit HaMikdash. Many of us (hips, legs and vertebrae permitting) reenact that performance in our synagogues to this day.

So, that gives us the format for our confessions, which have been stylized to contain an alphabetical list of sins and corrupt behavior. This does not exempt us from making our own declaration of sins that we know that we have transgressed in the past year. There is a critical word in this formula which we must analyze: ANA. This is an emphatic form of NA or 'please', perhaps in this context 'beseech'. Many of us grew up thinking this was the 'magic word', and so it might indeed be.

The Rav points out that this beseeching or begging for forgiveness is the key to understanding, perhaps, the most fundamental reality of the entire Teshuva process: It acknowledges the very possibility of repentance. Here we have each individual

member of the Jewish nation behaving like a desperate door to door salesman pleading with the Divine Ba'al HaBayit to ANA, open the door just a crack, so that we can present our case.

This scenario is, of course, part of our S'LICHOT procedure. Towards the beginning of the Ashkenazic S'LICHOT service we maintain that we are 'paupers and beggars banging on Your door'. Then we say the most reasonable continuation of this petition: Please (NA) don't turn us away from You empty handed.' We are begging God to answer the door. Towards the end of S'LICHOT (just before we sit hunched over in the TACHANUN prayer), we acknowledge:

O, Merciful One, Who answers the poor... Who answers the broken hearted... Who answers those broken in spirit, answer us... redeem us... deliver us... have compassion upon us, now, swiftly and soon.

Actually, this banging and pleading and begging goes on for the entire Ten Days of Repentance. The sincere penitent doesn't give up. This powerful process goes on until during the NE'ILA (closing) service we declare: Open for us the gate at this time when the gates are closing (NE'ILA), for the day is fading. The

day is fading, the sun is setting and leaving, we are coming into Your gates.

Finally, the gates crack open for this amazing moment. Our supplications and entreaties are answered. Before NE'ILA every year, I like to read the story of the Rav and his father Reb Moshe, (Rav Yom Kippur Machzor, p.768-769). Father and son stand outside the synagogue for a moment before the NE'ILA service begins, and father tells the son: This sunset is different from ordinary sunsets, for with it, forgiveness is bestowed upon for us for our sins.

The sunset is different because the Gates of Heaven have opened a crack, and our VIDUI, S'LICHOT, T'FILOT and begging is allowed in. It feels good and is worth the effort. Just be sincere. 🙏

G'MAR CHATIMA TOVA!