

# PATHWAYS TO TESHUVAH

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Rochelle Dimont and family  
on the yahrzeit of husband and father  
Rabbi Albert Dimont a"h

Shirley Sperling  
in memory of her mother  
Pesha bas Lazar a"h (Pola Lieber)  
and her brother  
Wolf Lippa ben Aharon a"h (William Leonard Lieber)

The Gemara (Yoma 86a) teaches: "Rabbi Matia ben Charash asked Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah in Rome, 'Are you familiar with the four categories of atonement of which Rabbi Yishmael used to preach?' He answered: 'They are three, and Teshuvah accompanies each of them: (1) If one fails to fulfill an affirmative commandment and then repents, he is forgiven on the spot. (2) If one transgresses a negative commandment and then repents, Teshuvah protects him and Yom Kippur atones. (3) If one transgresses a sin that carries the punishment of Karet or the death penalty and then repents, Teshuvah and Yom Kippur protect him and suffering cleanses him. But, if he has the sin of Chillul Hashem / desecration of G-d's Name on his hands, Teshuvah alone cannot protect him, Yom Kippur cannot atone for him, and suffering cannot cleanse him. Rather, they all protect him until death cleanses him'." [Until here from the Gemara]

Nevertheless, writes R' Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal z"l Hy"d (1885-1945; rabbi of, and Rosh Yeshiva in, Pieštany, Czechoslovakia; killed in the Holocaust), one can be confident of atonement for all of his sins on Yom Kippur, even the most serious sins, with no need for suffering to cleanse him, if he prays with the congregation on this holy day. The reason is that the Teshuvah referred to in the above Gemara, which does not bring complete atonement, is Teshuvah performed out of fear of punishment. However, Teshuvah performed together with the congregation automatically has the status of Teshuvah performed out of love for Hashem. Such Teshuvah, the Gemara teaches,

converts sins into merits, so that there is nothing left to atone. (Mishneh Sachir: Mo'adim p.234)

R' Meir Simcha Hakohen z"l (1843-1926; Dvinsk, Latvia) writes: A person who sins needs Hatzlachah / "good luck" in order not to cause a Chillul Hashem. Two people might commit the same sin, but their paths to atonement will be completely different because one sinned when no one was looking and the other happened to sin in front of ten Jews, thus causing a Chillul Hashem.

Why is atonement for Chillul Hashem so difficult? R' Meir Simcha explains: We speak of Hashem having a Bet Din because G-d set up a system of justice in Heaven that mimics a human court system. [This based on our Sages teaching, "The Kingdom of Heaven is similar to a kingdom on earth." One reason why Hashem acts in this way may be that we would otherwise be unable to relate to Him.] As such, Hashem does not judge alone; rather, He sits in judgment together with angels. And, a court that includes angels cannot forgive a person for Chillul Hashem, as that would be equivalent to judges on a court voting to overlook an insult to the Chief Judge. Such a vote would itself be insulting to the Chief Judge.

Nevertheless, R' Meir Simcha writes, there is one opportunity each year to receive atonement for Chillul Hashem -- at Ne'ilah, when man's judgment is sealed. Although Hashem judges man together with angels, He alone seals man's judgment. Notwithstanding the Gemara quoted above, in the waning hours of Yom Kippur, when man's judgment is being sealed, Hashem does overlook His honor, and he forgives even Chillul Hashem if one's regret and remorse are sincere enough. (Meshech Chochmah: Haftarah for Shabbat Shuvah)

R' Ben Zion Nesher shlita (one of the senior rabbis in Tel Aviv, Israel) writes: In light of the above, we can suggest a novel interpretation for the words of the Pesach Haggadah (in the poem Adir Hu): "Ruling in royalty, feared of right [literally, 'Feared according to Halachah'], those who surround Him say . . ." In reality, Hashem rules alone. Nevertheless, according to Halachah -- i.e., the Gemara quoted above -- He must be greatly feared because of those who surround Him -- i.e., the angels around Him who prevent the sin of Chillul Hashem from being forgiven. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Shir Tziyon p.119)

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### ***"Forgiveness is with You so that You will be feared." (Tehilim 130:4)***

R' Avraham Zvi Kluger shlita (Bet Shemesh, Israel) explains: If there were no forgiveness for sins, there would be no fear of G-d, and man would not refrain from sinning. Man would reason, "I have already sinned, so my soul is permanently stained; why not do as I please?" However, now that we know that G-d loves us and forgives our sins, we have fear of G-d and take care not to offend Him.

R' Kluger writes further: Ezra Ha'sofer gathered the generation that built the Second Temple and addressed them on Rosh Hashanah. He rebuked them for their sins, and they became heartbroken. "Don't cry!" he told them, "Today is a holy day; go eat and drink." (See Nechemiah ch.8.) Even so,

despite Ezra's seemingly soft approach, the next chapter of Nechemiah relates that, a few weeks later, the Jewish People did gather for public prayer and repentance. Why did Ezra "go easy" on them at the first gathering? Because, R' Kluger explains, a broken heart can be effective only when it is preceded by a feeling of closeness to Hashem--an awareness of Hashem's love for the penitent despite his sins. (Yichud Ha'hitbodedut p.39)

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In his old age, R' David Moshe Friedman z"l (1827-1903; the Chortkover Rebbe) was very weak and nearly blind, so that two attendants had to lead him wherever he went. One Erev Yom Kippur, as the attendants led him toward his seat for Kol Nidrei, he suddenly stopped and sighed deeply. Then he said, "Where are you taking me? To be judged by the King of Kings? But I have not yet repented properly!" And he began to sob uncontrollably.

Soon, all the onlookers were crying uncontrollably as well, and everyone was moved to repent wholeheartedly. (Quoted in Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

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Why do we open the Aron Kodesh when reciting Aleinu on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur?

R' Mordechai Yafeh z"l (Prague; died 1612) explains: All year long, we end the service with Aleinu so that we will leave the Shul after having bowed down to Hashem. Lest this prayer become routine, we open the Aron Kodesh when reciting it on the Days of Judgment to build up its esteem in our eyes so we will recite it with greater Kavanah / devotion year round. (Levush: siman 133)

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### **On the Importance of Appeasing Those We Have Hurt**

Our Sages teach that one cannot achieve atonement unless he appeases those against whom he has sinned. Some say that one cannot achieve atonement even for his sins against G-d unless he has properly atoned for his sins against man and received forgiveness. (Kaf Hachaim 606:3)

Why? Because atoning for only some sins is like immersing only part of one's body in a mikvah. Obviously, one does not attain purity by doing so. (Mussar Hamishnah)

R' Avraham Halevi Horowitz z"l (16<sup>th</sup> century; father of the Shelah Hakadosh) observes:

The obligation to ask forgiveness from those we have offended does not mean doing what is commonly done, i.e., that shortly before Kol Nidrei, one approaches his friends and asks their forgiveness. Inevitably, the friend responds, "You didn't do anything for which I have to forgive you." Then, these two friends forgive each other, something that was not necessary at all, since they were always dear to each other and would never wish each other harm.

In contrast, R' Horowitz continues, enemies tend not to ask forgiveness from one another. Rather, each one says, "If he were interested in peace, he would come to me." A wise man, however, recognizes that the true sign of strength is humility, and he would take the initiative to appease his enemy, even if his enemy is in the wrong. (Emek Berachah)

R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l writes: Requesting general forgiveness for all sins that one has committed against another is effective only for minor offenses. [If one committed a more serious offense, he must specify it when he requests forgiveness.] (Quoted in Halichot Shlomo: Moadim p.44)

If one who has sinned against you does not come to you to seek forgiveness, you should make yourself available to him so that he might ask forgiveness. (Mateh Ephraim)

***Because Yom Kippur does not atone until one appeases his neighbor, one should be certain to recite the following prayer (part of Tefilah Zakkah) which is printed in many machzorim:***

"I extend complete forgiveness to everyone who has sinned against me, whether physically or financially, or who has gossiped about me or even slandered me; so, too, anyone who has injured me, whether physically or financially, and for any sins between man and his neighbor--except for money that I wish to claim and that I can recover in accordance with halachah, and except for someone who sins against me and says, 'I will sin against him and he will forgive me'--except for these, I grant complete forgiveness, and may no person be punished on my account.

"And just as I forgive everyone, so may You (Hashem) grant me favor in every person's eyes so that he will grant me complete forgiveness."