

VIDUY: I CONFESS!

by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene

The Mitzvah:

Teshuvah is referred to in the verse: "for this mitzvah...is very close to you in your mouths and hearts to perform it" (Devarim 30:11-14). An integral theme of Yom Kippur, the 3 components of the teshuvah, repentance involve (1) Charatah, remorse for the misdemeanor (2) Kabbalah, commitment not to repeat his sinful behavior and (3) Viduy, to verbally confess his sin before G-d.

It takes real courage to confess one's failings.

This is obvious. After all, no one likes to admit that they were wrong. That they have messed up big time! How their life decisions and choices are demonstrated to have involved sins and misdemeanors.

So any admission of guilt comes as something of a surprise. It is an amazing test of character that a person openly acknowledges his shortcomings.

But what function does confession serve? Where the person knows his crime, and internally admits to the sin, why is there then the need to "verbalize" this externally? So why is Viduy a requisite part of the mitzvah of teshuvah, repentance and central to the atonement of Yom Kippur?

Confession is so pivotal, on a simple level, because it forces man to confront the essence of his humanity.

The humbling realization that he has "sinned" and not lived up to his calling is the most important factor to convince him to making amends. Where the person had arrogantly set himself up in a fantastical ivory tower of virtue, he has deluded himself in a self-flattering projection of something that he is just not. But where he is forced to openly confess to his serious crimes, this goes a long way to putting him back on track.

However there is a deeper angle to consider which relates to the anatomy of sin.

What makes "sin" possible is that man does not always see G-d. It is because man has not fulfilled the requirement to "forever place G-d before me" that he has faltered. His will was regretfully accorded greater prominence than the divine Will.

It was mankind who was endowed with bechira, "free will" to choose between good and evil. It was mankind whose superiority marks him as a medaber, "Speaker". Accordingly, it is necessary that man

employ the faculty of "speech" in confronting his humanity. The psychological effect of the viduy, verbal confession, where the sinner painfully admits to choosing evil over good, is the necessary catalyst to point out man's human failings and where he has erred. His crime sought to "conceal" G-d. Thus, the appropriate remedy is by showing remorse and "revealing" it before G-d.

Sin hides the glory of G-d. Confession and repentance, can counter this harm, in the revelation of G-d's glory.

The viduy negates the sinful premise that the "Eye [of G-d] that always sees does not always see" as man confesses how G-d, in fact, Knows all our actions before Him (See Sefer Hachinuch 364). This is how teshuvah can be efficacious.

Confession forces man to face the music. He is a sinner, tainted by having been unfaithful in his relationship with G-d. Nevertheless, all is not lost. He can return. The door is not closed. He can do teshuvah and be absolved. G-d wants him to return. To come back.

It is with the subordinate posture in the recital of viduy (standing with a bent, almost bowing back) that the penitent yields to G-d and is able to earn a full atonement.

May we all be sealed in the Book of Life! The course material is presented by Osher Chaim Levene, author of "Set in Stone: The Meaning of Mitzvah Observance" (Targum/Feldheim), a writer and educator in London.