

We all know that the key to the High Holidays is found in the sentence from the Book of Vayikra, "On this day He will make atonement for you to purify you from all your sins. Before G-d you shall be made pure." The rabbis explain that there are three different types of sins. There is Chait, which means sins in which you hurt someone, but you really did not mean to do it. The root of the word Chait means to miss the mark. You asked somebody how his brother was only to be told that he died last month. You vaguely remember that someone told you about his death, but you forgot about it. Or, you turn to your wife and say, "Why did you buy such an ugly dress?" You hurt her feelings terribly. You could have been more diplomatic in phrasing your response to seeing that new dress for the first time. Chait is a sin because you are insensitive or negligent. You may have accused somebody of stealing, only to remember after the words came out of your mouth that it was you who took the money out and put it in the bank. You missed the mark.

The rabbis say there is another word for sin, Avon. This type of sin is one you did out of weakness. You know you did the wrong thing, but you were just overcome by temptation. The girl was too beautiful; the money was too easy to take.

The rabbis say there is also a third type of sin, Peshah, which means that we sin deliberately and willfully and on principle. This is like what the old Jewish communists used to do when they would hold a Yom Kippur dance right in front of the shul. You did not even like the girl, but you wanted to prove that there was no such thing as public modesty. Or, on principle you refused to pay your charity obligations.

The rabbis tell us that we have three words for forgiveness. We ask G-d for Slach Lonim, to make us feel pure, Mechal Lonim, to forego punishment, and Kaper Lonu, to accept our restitution. We say, "G-d, if You cannot make us feel pure inside, at least forego punishment, and if You cannot forego punishment, at least accept our restitution." The rabbis say that sin not only make us liable for punishment, but it also makes us feel unclean. It makes us depressed and alienated. What we want on Yom Kippur is that we should be able to reconnect with those whom we have harmed and reconnect with G-d. We know that if we have missed the mark, if we have done a Chait, that we are really not liable for great punishment, but we still feel terrible inside, and we know that if we have committed a sin on purpose out of weakness, that we may gain forgiveness if we make restitution, but we need more than that. We need to feel that we can overcome our weaknesses and feel pure inside. If we have done bad things on principle, we know that we really deserve punishment, but we ask G-d to forego the punishment, but not just to forego our punishment but to make us feel clean inside again. We believe that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Every time we hurt somebody, we are liable for punishment, because we know that the individual involved will want to get back at us unless we reconcile with him and make it up. On Yom Kippur we have to reconnect with the people we have harmed, and we also must ask G-d to make us feel pure inside.

That's why we must all do Teshuva. The Rambam says that for every Mitzvah in the Torah, whether it is a positive or negative commandment and whether we violate it willingly or by

accident, that when we do Teshuva we must confess before G-d. We do not confess before a man or rabbi or priest but before G-d, and this confession must be formulated in words so we understand what we are doing. In the confession there must be three parts. We must say, "I have missed the mark, I have acted out of weakness, I have sinned on principle before You, but I am sorry for what I did and I will never do it again." We know many people who will confess that they have done something wrong and say they will not do it again, but they will also say, "That guy deserved it, and I am not sorry." I once heard a Mafioso type guy say, "I did wrong and I am sorry for what I did, but if I ever lost my money, I would do it again because it is worse to live without money than a bad conscience." Those people, of course, have not done Teshuva.

The Rambam, though, in the second paragraph of the first chapter on Teshuva, says that the scapegoat that was sent out by the priests on Yom Kippur is an atonement for all Israel, and that this scapegoat will forgive us for all our easy sins if we have not done Teshuva, and if we have done Teshuva it will forgive us for all our sins. The Rambam defines easy sins as sins that do not have as a punishment death by rabbinic court or excision. This seems very strange. The Rambam just the paragraph before had said that we have to do Teshuva and confess for any sin we did whether it is a sin of just missing the mark or a sin out of principle, but here he says that you do not have to do Teshuva for easy sins and the scapegoat will forgive you. What could this possibly mean?

We all know that we have a Kedusha, a sanctity, as a human being and a sanctity as a Jew. We know that in our prayers we mention both these sanctities. In our prayers we ask G-d to forgive our sins and the sins of His people, the House of Israel. We can sin as an individual and we can sin as a member of the Jewish people. We know that an individual could give charity to every good cause except Jewish causes. That person would not be sinning as an individual since he is giving charity, but he would be sinning as a Jew. Rabi says that Yom Kippur, itself, affects atonement, but that means that it affects atonement only for those sins which we sin as a Jew. That's why the Rambam here says that the scapegoat forgives us for the easy sins. The hard sins, which he defines here as rabbinic court death penalty, which was hardly ever effected, and excision, which means being cut off from the Jewish people. If a person eats chometz on Pesach, he is cut off from the Jewish people, if not he, then his children or grandchildren. If a person does not fast on Yom Kippur, he will be cut off from the Jewish people, either he or his children or his grandchildren. They will assimilate. They will no longer want to be part of the Jewish people. The Rambam is telling us that by the very act of coming to shul on Yom Kippur, we want to be part of the Jewish people and identify as a Jew so that the very act of coming to shul on Yom Kippur brings us atonement, even if we did not do Teshuva because it declares that we still want to be part of the Jewish people. Perhaps that is why so many Jews come to shul on Yom Kippur because, in spite of the fact that they do not do or participate in much Jewish life throughout the whole year, they still want to be part of the Jewish people. For sins as an individual, of course, just coming to shul on Yom kippur will not help. For our sins as a human being we have to make

restitution. We have to make up to the person we have wronged and do Teshuva and confess our sins.

The Rambam goes on in the first chapter to say that if we do Teshuva for violating a positive commandment, then our sins are immediately forgiven. If we sin by violating a negative commandment and do Teshuva, our Teshuva hangs until Yom Kippur when our sin is forgiven. If we violate a precept which will cause excision or the death penalty by rabbinic court and we do Teshuva, then he says that Teshuva and Yom Kippur causes our sin to hang, but that different troubles that will come upon us will grant us atonement. He goes on to list a few more sins and how they hang until certain things happen.

This is astounding because in the seventh chapter on the laws of Teshuva, the Rambam says that if a person will do Teshuva, the Teshuva brings close those that are far. "Last night you were despised before G-d, distant and alien. Today you are beloved, a friend and close to G-d." It does not speak at all of sins hanging after you have done Teshuva. How can we understand what the Rambam said in the first chapter and square it with what he said in the seventh chapter?

The rabbis tell us that there are two types of Teshuva. There is a Teshuva Meira, from fear, and there is a Teshuva Meava, from love. They explain that these two types of Teshuva are both efficacious, but one deals with changing individual acts, but it does not really affect a

person's total personality. The other affects the person's total personality. They are a changed person. They adopt a different perspective and attitude toward life. Resh Lokesh says that if a person does Teshuva, his sins will be turned into accidental sins. A few sentences later, Resh Lokesh says that if a person does Teshuva, his sins will be turned into merits. The rabbis all ask, how is that possible?

They answer that one is a Teshuva from fear and one is a Teshuva from love. The Rambam says in the second chapter what is considered a complete Teshuva, and he says a complete Teshuva is when a person is confronted by the same situation and he desists. That shows that that is a complete Teshuva. It could be that he is desisting because of other factors. They got a new burglar alarm or a new accounting system, and he is not going to steal anymore, or the woman's husband got a gun, and he does not want to be shot, or physically he is not able to do as many things as he could before. This is also considered a Teshuva, but the person is really not changing out of conviction. He is changing because of circumstances or even an intellectual awareness, but from his heart he is really not changing. We all know this from dieting. Many people are told to go on a diet or they will have a heart attack, but in so many cases individuals will not listen until they have the heart attack. After they have the heart attack, their attitude changes and they are able to keep the weight off. We know that from smoking, too. One of my friends told me he does not know why people think it is so hard to stop smoking. He has stopped hundreds of times. Intellectually, we can be sure of a certain position, but unless our heart is with it, then we will not be able to follow

through.

That's why the Rambam mentions here in the third paragraph of the second chapter that anybody who confesses his sin but he really did not do it with his full heart, that although we do not know whether he did it with his full heart, we will wait and see. That's why the Rambam says that for certain sins they hang until Yom Kippur comes, or they hang until Yom Kippur and other troubles come because we do not know whether this Teshuva is really going to be efficacious. We have to wait and see. However, if a person does Teshuva with his whole heart, then it immediately takes place and immediately transforms the person from one who was far away and alienated from G-d and others to one who is close and connected to G-d and others. The Teshuva Meira may change our sins into accidental sins, and they may cause us to forego punishment, but until the Teshuva penetrates our heart, we will find it hard to feel pure.

On these ten days of repentance culminating on Yom Kippur, we all want to feel pure. We all want to reconnect with our fellow human beings. May we all gain atonement as a Jew and as a human being, and may we all feel pure before G-d so we can approach the tasks that we have to do in the year ahead with a clear conscience and with the knowledge that we can be close to each other and close to G-d. Amen.