



## Confession and Redemption

*Beset by many evils and troubles, they will say, "It is because G-d is no longer with me that these evil things have befallen me." On that day I will utterly hide My face because of all the evil that they have done...*  
(Devarim 31:17-18)

Rambam says that this admission of guilt and regret is still not a full confession, and therefore G-d continues to hide His face. But the hiding is different: no longer is it a hiding of G-d's mercy, allowing evil to befall them, but rather a hiding of the ultimate Redemption. That change in G-d's relationship contains a hint to their ultimate redemption when their repentance is complete.

To better understand this, we must first understand the function of verbal confession in the *teshuva* process. Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 364) offers two explanations of the benefit of verbal confession. First, verbalizing one's repentance creates the feeling of conversing with a second party, which, in turn, sensitizes a person to the reality of G-d's presence, G-d's awareness of his every deed, and the need to render an account before G-d. The greater a person's awareness that his sin was one in G-d's presence, with His full knowledge, the greater his shame and regret. Secondly, verbal expression intensifies the process and leaves a more lasting effect.

In addition to regret over the past, *teshuva* also requires a commitment not to repeat the sin again. That commitment must be so decisive, resolute, and firm that G-d Himself can testify that at the moment of confession,

the sinner does not contemplate ever committing that sin again. Just as a vow to do (or not to do) something in the future requires verbal expression, so, too, does the commitment not to repeat past sins.

### Layers of Impurity

There is yet another aspect of confession that relates to the nature of sin itself. Sin, says the Maharal, is only incidental to the soul of the Jew. It cannot blemish the soul itself. Rather it superimposes layers of impurity that separate one from his essence. Since the Jew's connection to G-d is through that untainted essence, when he becomes distant from his essence, he also becomes estranged from G-d.

*Teshuva*, then, is the return of the Jew to his essence and the breakdown of the barriers that separate him from G-d. G-d does not leave the Jew when he sins; rather the Jew loses contact with G-d, Who still resides within the essence of his soul. As the Sages say on the verse, "I am asleep, but my heart is awake" (Song of Songs 5:2), "my heart" refers to G-d. Though the Jew sleeps and loses consciousness of G-d, G-d still occupies his heart.

By articulating his sin in the *Vidui* confession, the Jew makes it something external to himself. Then he is able to detach those layers of sin that have accreted on his soul. *Vidui* itself becomes an act of purification. Thus, Targum Yonatan translates the word "purify" in the verse "Before G-d should you purify yourself" (Leviticus 16:30), as "confess." The confession is itself the act of purification.

It is this last aspect of full *Vidui* which is lacking in the confession, "Because G-d is not with me, all these misfortunes have befallen me." Although this statement expresses regret, recognition of the devastation resulting from sin, and even hints to a commitment to avoid this state in the future, it is still lacking. There is no recognition that it is not G-d Who has deserted us, but we who have become detached from ourselves and therefore from G-d.

When a Jew feels G-d has abandoned him, says Sforno, he gives up hope, since he thinks that it is G-d Who must first return. But in truth it is man who has strayed from his essence, and he can find G-d where he originally left Him. *Teshuva* is thus literally redemption: "Return to Me, for I have redeemed you" (Isaiah 44:22). One redeems his untainted essence from the layers of sin and impurity that encrust it.

As long as we fail to comprehend this aspect of redemption, G-d continues to hide the face of redemption from us. When we appreciate all the aspects of *Vidui*, including that recognition that G-d remains where He always was, waiting for us to strip away the barriers, we can look forward to both personal and national redemption.

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