



Facing Our Truth

Why is it difficult for us to pray on Yom Kippur? Why did our mothers and fathers shed tears like water while we count how many pages are left in the *machzor*? Maybe because our ancestors knew they would die one day, but we tend to think we never will. That is if we even bother to think about the most important issue at all.

Human life is short and fragile. True, our lives today are a little less short than those of our ancestors. But that does not really change anything. Each of us will stand before the Creator of the World when his day comes, whether in 20 years, 40, or maybe even tomorrow, G-d forbid. The infantile cult of today's youth is fueled by vigorous repression of this certain prediction. 40-year-olds pretend to look and act like 20-year-olds as if they would be able to deceive death itself. But if I easily recognize they are 40-year-olds and not boys at the height of their youth, I don't think the angel of death will be confused either.

There are only two biographical details we all have in common: we are all born and we will all die. Amazing how much energy we invest in ignoring this simple fact.

A person who knows he will die one day always lives in a consciousness of accountability. One day, maybe tomorrow, he will stand before G-d and have to justify every deed he has done and every choice he has made. Our ancestors, who lived in such consciousness, stood in shul and wept on Yom Kippur, begging G-d to postpone

the day of their deaths, and striving to make their lives more worthy. And they especially shed tears for their children. If my wife and I have four children, then I pray to G-d for six souls, not just one.

Perhaps there is another reason why it is difficult for us to pray: it diminishes us. For true prayer, one must admit that G-d is Great and All-Powerful and I am small and fragile. How hard it is for our generation to admit this. Who do we identify with? We see the answer in popular movies and Purim costumes: we adore the invincible superheroes of the comic book world. Are we really like that? Are we supposed to be like that – invincible heroes who overpower their opponents with the help of superpowers?

Prof. Mordechai Rotenberg, Israel Prize laureate, developed a method of psychological treatment based on the Jewish spirit. He tells the story of the time a man came to him for help. "My wife is very assertive and tramples over me time and time again. I'm too gentle." To which the professor replied: "If you had gone to another psychologist, they would have encouraged you to become more aggressive. Since you've come to me, I'm telling you your behavior is totally okay. Send your wife to me for treatment."

Every day, I see advertisements for personal empowerment workshops, as if what we lack is more power. I wish I would see more self-awareness workshops instead – a true awareness of the real and weak self. On second thoughts, it is no wonder that despite

all the propaganda, our contemporaries seek empowerment workshops and feel they lack personal power. For under the guise of the superheroes' cloaks and masks, humanity is becoming more and more neurotic, more and more complicated, weaker and weaker. The gap between Clark Kent and Superman is widening. Even when we dress up in colorful tights, a mask and a robe, we remain the same anxious and frustrated human beings, mortal and transient.

In recent years, I have heard more and more voices calling to erase the despair of the *Yamim Noraim*. People find it difficult to cope with the *vidui*, the litany of their shortcomings. True, a confession can also include an acknowledgment of virtues, but a person busy counting his virtues and successes all year long, a person full of his achievements, wrapping himself day and night in the victor's robe, can he not allow himself – for one day of the year – to admit he is not the epitome of human perfection?

Why is it difficult for us to pray on Yom Kippur? It's a complex question, on which volumes can be written, and there would still be more to discuss. But I think the first line would be very simple: it is difficult for us to pray because it is difficult for us to look in the mirror.

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