HILKHOT TESHUBA 2:10. Teshuba via email (part 6)

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Teshuba, repentance for what we did wrong, can happen in two separate areas. First, with “ritual” offenses . This category includes, for example, when one transgresses the Shabbat or Holidays or does not care about the laws of kashrut, or when we disconnect from God, we do not pray or thank Him for all He has given us, etc. All these offenses are repaired by doing Teshuba. That is, 1. accepting that we made a mistake, 2. repenting; having remorse 3. articulating verbally our transgressions (confession / Viduy) and 4. making the decision to change and improve. If we do all this, our Sages explain, forgiveness is “guaranteed” (□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□).

Second are the offenses to other people. If I harm someone financially, or if I hurt someone physically, or if I damaged someone emotionally offending him, insulting or embarrassing him. These offenses are NOT forgiven on Yom Kippur without a previous step. We can not fix with God the damages we did to other individuals. That would be religious hypocrisy. The damage inflicted intentionally or unintentionally to another person should be repaired first, with that person: the victim.

I have to amend materially what I did wrong: if I stole, return the stolen item. If I broke my neighbor’s window, pay for its repair. If I hurt someone physically (□□□□) take care of medical costs. After I materially repaired the damage I did, I must also apologize to the victim. And finally, ask forgiveness from God for having hurt one of my peers.

Now, what happens when the damage had no material or financial consequences? In the event that the damage was emotional, I have to get close to that person and ask for his or her forgiveness. From a practical standpoint, the cases of emotional harm are more difficult to fix, since there is no material compensation to make up for the suffering of the victim.

Apologizing to people we have offended or damaged emotionally is perhaps one of the most difficult tasks we face before Yom Kippur.

As we prepare ourselves to ask forgiveness, we must overcome our shame (how am I going to admit that I acted wrong? !!), Our fear of rejection (what if he or she does not forgive me?) And especially our pride (No! I did not act wrong! He deserved it!).
Asking forgiveness is very difficult but absolutely necessary for our Teshuba on Yom Kippur.
Question: Can I apologize by phone or email? I do not think there is a single answer to cover all possible cases. But in my opinion, it is a matter of common sense. I believe that sometimes it is easier for those who ask forgiveness not to face their victim. So calling or emailing might work. I would say that regardless of the tools we use to ask forgiveness, the most important thing is that my apology would be sincere and credible: that is, not mixed with excuses, and as accurate as possible. There are some apologies that are not apologies: if I say, for example: “I’m sorry you felt offended by what I said.” Here I’m not admitting I did something wrong. What’s more, indirectly, I’m blaming the victim of being “too sensitive”! Which not only will not serve to repair my error, but it can magnify it.
Another classic question: “What if I badmouth a person, and that person does not know what I did… Do I have to apologize? Because if I ask forgiveness, maybe things would get worse?.” In this particular case, I think I can apologize without specifying what I did and said. However, when the victim knows what I did, my apology must be specific.