A Yom Kippur Preparation

We are only a few days away from Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the most important day of the year for a Jewish individual.

In Yom Kippur we can not improvise. We have to prepare ourselves for this moment in advance. In addition to knowing the details of the day of fasting (who should fast, who does not, how to proceed when one can not fast, etc.) if we really want to live intensely the experience of a "Day of Forgiveness" we should go deep into the concept of Teshuba .

Teshuba, the process of repentance, consists according to Maimonides in three, or four steps, according to the nature of what we want to correct.

1. **HAKARAT HAHET**. The first thing we must do is recognizing that we have acted wrongly. We must free ourselves from excuses and blame transference (when I blame everyone else, except myself, for my mistakes) and recognizing that I was wrong. If I am not able to accept my responsibility, I will not be able to advance to the following levels of Teshuba. If I have offended or hurt friends, colleagues and loved ones, I must take charge. And if I betrayed our covenant with HaShem, voluntarily or involuntarily, I must acknowledge it and take responsibility, otherwise forgiveness will not be possible.

2. **TIQUN**. Repair. If you have not offended or caused any injury or damage to another person, you can proceed to the next step. But if you are more a human than an angel, and as such, you have caused some harm to others, intentionally or not, you must do everything possible to repair the damage you caused. Examples: if you have taken money or other material goods from another person, you must return it or compensate the owner for it. If you have personal debts, unpaid donations, etc., you must pay those bills NOW, before Yom

Kippur. If you have offended someone with words: you spoke negatively about someone, or you mocked or bullied someone, etc. you must arm yourself with courage, approach the person you offended and ask for his or her forgiveness. If you do not have the possibility to apologize in person, or if you have a hard time talking face to face with the offended, you can do it by phone or by any other means. The most important thing is that you apologies are not half- apologies or apologies where you assign part of the blame to the victim("I'm sorry *you* felt offended by my words" etc.). Apologies must be sincere, credible and transmitted with humility. Our Sages affirm that if I do not ask forgiveness and I repair what I did wrong towards others, those transgressions will not be forgiven by God on Yom Kippur.

3. **VIDUY**. The most important Mitsva of Yom Kippur is the Viduy or confession. This confession is done privately, in silence, but articulating the words. On the day of Kippur, we confess before God all the sins we have committed against Him or against other people. It is very important to mention the specific faults that we have committed. According to our Sages, recognizing our wrongdoings or bad habits mentally is the first step of Teshuba (this is actually what we do when we hear the Shofar on Rosh Hashana). But this recognition can only be effective and lead to a change when we verbalize it. Only then, when we get the courage to articulate what we did wrong, we are able to overcome what we did wrong and improve. The Sages explained that all I need to do to obtain HaShem's forgiveness for offenses against His Tora (Shabbat, Kashrut, Tefilla, etc.) is to recognize and articulate my faults and shortcomings. B'H we will talk a little more about the Viduy in the coming days.

4. **AZIBAT HAHET.** The final step of a sincere Teshuba is "change". Changing my wrong behavior, modifying my bad habits, improving the negative elements of my personality and reconsider my values. This is the biggest challenge of Yom

Kippur. “Change” will take place, obviously, after Yom Kippur. But on Yom Kippur we must resolve that we want to be better, and we should make the decision to change. Contemporary rabbis explain that if we can improve even if only a small area of our behavior, and this change is firm and solid, it is enough.

In choosing the area of behavior that we resolve to change, we must consider something that is meaningful and at the same time feasible, not “impossible”. We should find an area of change that represents a balance between the significant and the attainable.