

# Yom Kippur Confessions

 Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson  
From the Sichos in English Collection

One of the mainstays of the Yom Kippur service is the *Al Chet*, the confessional prayers recited no less than ten times during the hours immediately preceding Yom Kippur as well as on the day itself.

There is a dispute in the *Gemara*<sup>1</sup> regarding the manner of confession. Rabbi Yehudah maintains that individual sins must be cited and acknowledged, while Rabbi Akiva holds that they need not be mentioned.

Do they disagree?

*Tosafos* explains<sup>2</sup> that Rabbi Yehudah believes the sins must be mentioned “so that he feel ashamed of his sins,” while Rabbi Akiva holds that he need not cite his sins “so that he not be suspected of [also having committed] other sins.”

But why does one sage contend that feeling a sense of “shame” during confession outweighs the possibility of being suspected of other sins, while the other holds that the fear of being suspected outweighs the importance of one’s sense of shame?

“Feeling ashamed of one’s sins” is germane to one’s current repentance: When a person is truly ashamed of a sin, then his regret as well as his resolve to behave better in the future will be more intense.

Conversely, the “loss” that derives from “being suspect of other sins” relates to the future — he may lose his credibility; his being suspected of additional sins will be used by his detractors, etc.

Accordingly, the dispute of the sages hinges on<sup>3</sup> whether current behavior is to be predicated on a (possible) future situation.

Rabbi Yehudah maintains that since mentioning the actual sins is germane to a person’s current repentance, making it more sincere, we therefore do not concern ourselves with any possible future results.

Rabbi Akiva, however, feels<sup>4</sup> that one must reckon in the present with the effect which actions will have in the future. Therefore, although citing particular sins would have a beneficial effect on a person’s repentance, we must be wary of the damage that will result in the future. He therefore maintains that individual sins need not be cited.

Their dispute may also be explained on a deeper level: There are many levels of repentance. Generally, they are divided into two categories: “repentance out of fear” and “repentance out of love.”<sup>5</sup>

With regard to “repentance out of fear,” it is logical to assume the necessity of enumerating one’s sins. For since the person is repenting out of fear of punishment, the fear for having committed a grave sin is much

greater than that for having committed a minor transgression.

Thus it follows that the person must enumerate his sins, for were he not to do so, he would be lacking in feeling about their severity, and consequently his repentance would be lacking.

Specifying the sin, however, is not so important when one “repents out of love,” inasmuch as the person is not thinking about punishment, but about his connection to G-d. Since even a minor sin causes a person to be sundered from G-d,<sup>6</sup> no great benefit will derive from citing the actual sin; when considering a sin’s ability to sever a person’s love for G-d, all sins are quite similar.

In fact, all degrees of repentance share a common basis — the desire to return and cleave to G-d. When a person repents out of fear, it means that his coarseness conceals — even from himself — the true basis of his repentance, which is love.

Thus, Rabbi Akiva, who sees within the present its deeper and future results, also perceives the inner aspect of repentance — that even when repentance is done out of fear it is essentially being done out of love.

Enumerating one’s sins — necessary when repenting out of fear — is thus not at all crucial.

Based on *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XXIV, pp. 239-242

#### FOOTNOTES

1. *Yerushalmi*, conclusion of tractate *Yoma*. See also *Talmud Bavli*, *Yoma* 86b; *Tosefta ibid.*, 4:14; *Yerushalmi*, *Nedarim* 5:4.
2. Titled *Leichosh* — *Gittin* 35b, based on the *Yerushalmi*, *Nedarim*, *ibid.*
3. See *S’dei Chemed*, *Klallim*, *Ma’areches Zayin*, *Klal Aleph*. See also *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XV, p. 453ff.
4. See also *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XIX, p. 70, 73ff.
5. *Yoma* 86a-b.
6. See *Tanya*, ch. 20ff. at length.

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