

VIDUI

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What does Hashem want from us? And what do we want from ourselves?

Dovid HaMelech was confronted by Nosson HaNavi after his incident with Batsheva. He was given a *moshal*, a parable, and had no idea that the story was about him. After hearing the *moshal* and casting judgement on the man, Nosson HaNavi declares “*Atah haish!*” - You are the man! This is really all about you!

The Navi describes what happens next.

נתן - ויאמר דוד אל נתן - *And David said to Nosson.*

But then there is a blank space. Why? We find the words of Dovid next. Just two words.

לה' חטאתי *I have sinned against G-d.*

A space and two words. Why?

The Vilna Gaon explains that the space is telling us the mindset of Dovid. The space is the silence that filled the room. Dovid is engaged in an inner struggle. This is a huge moment. He has been confronted and now he is consumed with inner turmoil. I am the *melech!* I am the king! Technically I am right! I did not really do anything wrong. What is he talking about?

Finally, Dovid made a decision. לה' חטאתי *I have sinned against G-d*, he cried out in anguish. Dovid was heartbroken.

The Rambam teaches us in *Hilchos Teshuvah* that *vidui* is inseparable from *teshuvah*. The mitzvah of *teshuvah* in the Torah makes clear mention of *vidui*. “*Vihisvadu es chatoseichem asher taasu*” - And they, the Jewish people should confess their sins that they committed.

There is no *teshuvah* unless it is accompanied by verbal confession.

Yes, we want to do better. Yes, we want to be better. But this becomes a fleeting thought along with thousands of other thoughts. For a thought to have lasting meaning we must create words that are expressed and clarified.

The person who can pause, contemplate, stop blaming, stop rationalizing, stop minimizing the actions and hurt caused, and then say like Dovid haMelech: “חטאתי לה'” *I have sinned against You, Hashem.* Yes, I am responsible. This person has experienced a life changing moment.

This brings us to the *vidui* confession, the confessional prayer of Yom Kippur.

First some thoughts about *vidui* so that we can approach the moment properly.

**Vidui* is recited standing in a bowed position similar to that used during Shemoneh Esrei, while saying the Modim prayer. It is important not to lean on something.

**Vidui* is said in the order of the *Aleph Beit*, to help us rectify our actions against the 22 sacred letters of the *Aleph Beit* through which the Torah is written. The *Chayei Adam* teaches us that if one knows that he needs to add a certain action or transgression that was committed, it should be integrated into the *vidui*. For example, if you realize you have not davened with proper *kavanah* and thought then by the letter ‘*heh*’, when we recite “*he’evinu*” - we have caused perversion, we would add “*hispalalti bli kavanah re’uyah*” - I davened without proper mindfulness.

So, it would be wise to take the time before Yom Kippur arrives and contemplate. What do I want to add to my *vidui*? Make it real. Make it personal.

**Vidui* is recited in *lashon rabim*, in the plural form. *Ashamnu. Bagadnu. Gazalnu.* We have become guilty. We have betrayed. We have robbed. If this is such a personal moment why are we talking about other people's sins?

The *Sefer Chasidim* explains that this based on the concept of *areivut*, responsibility. We are not only accountable to ourselves. We are responsible for one another. We are davening not only for ourselves, but we must make room in our lives, in our hearts, for others as well. I am not simply asking for forgiveness for myself. I cannot just focus on myself and be self-absorbed. Hashem, I care for my people. Please Hashem, heal us. Send us your *brochot*. Take us out of this *tza'ar*, grief. Forgive us. Help us through this difficult darkness.

With a broken heart, Dovid went on to compose his Tehillim. In *Perek Nun Aleph*, Dovid says "*Lev tahor bara li Elokim, veru'ach nachon chadesh bekirbi*" - Hashem create in me a pure heart and renew within me a true spirit.

Now we are ready to recite *vidui* and recreate ourselves to be the person we were meant to be.

The first ingredient in *vidui* is the emotion involved. Simply reciting a list of sins by rote will not reach the greatness of what *vidui* can accomplish for us. Obviously we are not telling Hashem anything new. Hashem has seen it all. Hashem has heard it all. We are speaking to ourselves, seeing the truth within ourselves and asking Hashem to help us heal our spiritual deficiencies so that we can live with purpose and meaning.

We begin to recite *vidui* and say "*Aval anachnu va'avoseinu chatanu,*" BUT we and our forefathers have sinned.

Why *aval*, why but?

This word, *aval*, but, has allowed us to fall into the place we are in. We often know that we are doing something that is not right. 'I really shouldn't do this/say this/ have done that/said

that/reacted like that, BUT....' And then we add our excuse.

Now we must simply say *Aval anachnu chatanu.* No excuses now.

Let us try to take a few lines from *vidui* for better understanding.

1. *Ashamnu.* We have become guilty.

Rav Hirsch teaches that *shmamah* is an empty space. *Shamem* is mental desolation, an emptiness of the mind. Add the *aleph* and now we are saying I am responsible for the spiritual desolation in my life.

We come into this world with tremendous potential. Each one of us has our own unique gifts to bring to this world. Hashem has given us the power of speech, of energy, of mind, of love, of time, and what have we done with all our blessings? Have we become givers or takers? Built or destroyed?

We are responsible. We write our own story.

2. *Bagadnu.* We have betrayed.

Rav Hirsch teaches us that *bagadnu* is from the *lashon* of *beged*, a garment. If I fail to justify the trust that is placed in me as a human being filled with character and truth then I am merely a *beged* of a person, an empty garment lacking inner essence. A *bogged* is called a traitor.

Bagadnu means we have betrayed loved ones who have counted on us for kind words, for loyalty, for support. We have betrayed Hashem by being ungrateful for the life we have been given. Instead of gratitude we have complained or acted entitled. We have looked at other people's blessings and forgotten about our own.

3. *Gazalnu.* We have robbed.

Who me? Rob? Steal?

We have taken money, borrowed property and ingredients, without paying back. We have enjoyed Hashem's earth and all its bounties without saying a blessing. We have robbed

people of their privacy and dignity, forwarded embarrassing texts and videos. We have robbed people of their time.

I ask that you take time before Yom Kippur and contemplate the words of *vidui*.

I would like to leave you with my prayer, my blessing from my heart.

My mother, Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis *a"h* told me that when my Zayda, HaRav Avraham HaLevi Jungreis *zt'l* came from Bergen Belsen, he asked everyone he met:

"Did you see my father? Did you see my mother? My brothers? My sisters?"

"No. We did not see them." The answer was always the same.

But then my Zayda met a man who said, "I saw them. I saw your father, the Rav, your mother, the Rebbetzin, and the grandchildren, the

babies, all in line at the gas chambers. You are the sole survivor. Everyone else was murdered."

With tears, my Zayda cried out in Yiddish, "*Ribono Shel Olahm, Ich beit nur eine zach...*I beg of You Hashem, only one thing. That all of my children and all of my descendants, and all Jewish children, should remain loyal to Torah."

I call out to Hashem, *Avinu Malkeinu*, yes, we have made our mistakes. *Ashamnu. Bagadnu*. We have caused desolation, we have been ungrateful. But in our heart of hearts we have just one *tefillah*, one wish. That we, our children, all our children remain loyal to You. Help us Hashem. Help us live as Your children, Your nation. Give us the *koach*- strength, to get through this difficult time, open our hearts and our children's hearts, bring us home to *Yerushalayim*, heal us and help us raise the next generation of *Klal Yisroel*.

Show us Your kindness and forgive us.