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Selichos: Whistle While You Work

The Holy Ba'al Shem Tov once praised a man who would smile, sing joyously and clap while reciting the serious *Viduy* prayer. The local townsfolk were fed up with this man's bizarre behavior, and asked the Baal Shem Tov to convince him to stop. When the tzadik approached the man and inquired into the reason for his strange custom, the simple Jew explained:

"I am a servant of the King, and I have been charged with a *tafkid*, a job. On Yom Kippur, my orders are to clean the filth from the gutters of the royal palace and scrape away the layers of dirt from the King's courtyard. While usually such work is unpleasant, working in the royal palace is the greatest privilege. How fortunate I am to be in the service of the King! I'm so excited to do His Will, whatever He wants of me. What a blessing it is just to serve the King!"

After meeting this special Jew, the Baal Shem Tov related that the man's *kavanos*, intentions, were indeed lofty and praiseworthy.

In the context of preparing for Yom Kippur and entering the *avodah* of teshuvah, Rambam frames our act of *vidui* as "the

height of forgiveness" (*Hilchos Teshuvah*, 2:7). We are charged with the joyous *avodah* of teshuvah, and the privilege to be cleansed before Hashem. However, it may not always seem joyous. "Cleaning the gutters", and getting down into the nitty-gritty of the details of our wrongdoings in order to confess them, verbalizing our mistakes line by line (or even singing them) may seem strange and uncomfortable. It may be unpleasant to suggest that we may have committed the full spectrum of shortcomings in our Divine service and relationships with those whom we love: "We have robbed...we have falsely accused...we have misled others..."

Often we carry the heavy burden of our mistakes and can feel weighed down by the pain of guilt, remorse and regret for our wrongdoings and failures. We might at times feel oppressed by the possibility that we have not been forgiven, that *vidui* didn't produce the "heights of forgiveness" for us. It may even appear as if the negative terminology of *vidui* presents a challenge or an obstacle to teshuvah.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook, zy'a, addresses this kind of collateral damage that can result, especially when one

who has developed spiritual sensitivity, *yiras Shamayim* and a fear of wrongdoing, recognizes that he or she may have done something to disappoint their Creator. Knowing that we are infinitely indebted to Hashem, and constantly responsible before Him, makes the awareness of a shortcoming terribly painful. As HaRav Kook writes, in this case we shouldn't just passively wait for Hashem to remove the pain and impose upon us a sense of being forgiven: האדם הכואב תמיד על עוונותיו ועוונות העולם, צריך הוא תמיד למחול ולסלוח לעצמו ולעולם כולו, ובזה הוא ממשיך סליחה ואור חסד על ההויה כולה, ומשמח את המקום ומשמח את הבריות. ובתחילה צריך למחול לעצמו, ואחר כך הוא ממשיך מחילה כללית על הכל, וכל הקרוב קרוב קודם, על ענפי שרשיו, מצד הנשמה, ועל משפחתו, אוהביו, דורו, אומתו, עולמו, וכל העולמים. ובזה הוא יסוד עולם בדרגא עילאה...ומתגלה כל הטוב הגנוז בכל...

One who grieves constantly for his sins and the sins of the world *must constantly forgive and absolve himself and the whole world*. In doing so, he draws forgiveness and a light of loving-kindness onto all of being, and brings joy to God and to His creatures.

He must first forgive himself, and afterward cast a broad forgiveness over all, the nearest to him first, on the branches of the roots of the soul, and on his family, his loved ones, his generation, and his world, and all worlds...and thus is revealed all the good that is hidden away in everything... (*Shemonah Kevatzim*, II:150)

Forgiving ourselves and letting go of immobilizing guilt might sound like a difficult maneuver, as well. However if we meditate on the words of the *Vidui* text, we

will see deeper meaning in the repeated phrase, על חטא שחטאנו לפניך, “(Forgive us) for the sin that we committed *lefanecha*, ‘in front of You...’”

Lefanecha can also mean ‘in Your Presence’, as we sing on Friday Nights, “*Pnei Shabbos*, the Shabbos presence, let us receive...” If we recognize that we are always in the compassionate, royal Presence of Hashem even when we violate His will and command, something in us can shift. If in moments of shame and failure we are nonetheless *lefanecha*, it means we still have the *zechus* of working in the Royal Palace, in the service of the King. Then, despite our mistakes, we will appreciate *Selichos* not only as an *avoda* of seriousness, but as one of *simchah*, as well. We can see this *avodah* as a gift, an opportunity to be cleansed and uplifted by Hashem, and to improve our service to the King.

May we be blessed to taste the heights of purity and joy in complete *teshuvah*, and may we merit to fulfill the will of the *Ribbono shel Olam* with love and with song! ■

Coding Chug for 6th-10th Graders

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checking response.status_code (if you get 200, try moving to the
if response.status_code != 200:
print("Status: ", response.status_code)

```

Python Courses in
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