

Ki Tavo Dvar Torah, Rabbi David Mahler

My mother often boasts that she, and many other Jewish mothers, have their PhD's in guilt.

Professionally, many other Jewish mothers are travel agents.....for guilt trips.

The beginning of our *parsha* discusses *Vidui Ma'asros* - the Tithing Confession. At the completion of the three-year *Ma'aser* cycle a person must recite a "confession" and give an accounting of whether he has been judicious in properly distributing all the various agricultural gifts as required. The person must be able to proclaim, "I have removed all the sacred portions from my house. I have given the appropriate portions to the *Leviim* and to the orphan and widow, following all the commandments You prescribed to us. I have not violated your commandments, and have not forgotten anything." (*Devarim* 26: 13).

This recitation is known as *Vidui Ma'asros* - the Tithing Confession. However, when examining the words of the confession, we notice that the recitation does not sound like a confession at all. We know the meaning of *Vidui*, confession. We recite *vidui* many times during the *Yamim Noraim*. In the *vidui* we are familiar with, we bang our chests as we utter statements such as: "We are guilty, we have cheated, we have stolen, we are evil and we have spoken badly of others. We confess for the sin that we committed in this way and for the sin we committed in that way. That is the way that a "*Vidui*" is supposed to sound! The statement "I have done everything You have commanded me to do", simply does not have the "ring" of a confession!

What is the confession being made? It seems more of an affirmation than a confession.

Rav Soloveitchik teaches that this alternative confession is the holiest and most inspirational one. *Vidui* and *Teshuva*, repentance, are two sides of the same coin. At the core of every confession, is the implicit acknowledgement that I could've gotten it right. I should've gotten it correct. If I wasn't capable of doing it correctly, if I didn't have the capacity to get it right - I'd never feel bad or guilty that I didn't do it.

One only confesses that they acted improperly or inappropriately, when they feel they should've or could've done it better – when one feels they have the capacity and potential to do it but failed to do so.

When the farmer comes to *Hashem* and says I sinned it. I did everything as You asked. The confession is - Just like I got this all right, I can get everything right.

The confession is not vis a vis the produce and *maaser*. The *vidui* is if I can get this right, I can get everything else correct.

Vidui is at the essence of repentance because a person is coming to *Hashem* saying I can be great. I can be what You have in mind for me. I can accomplish great things in this world.

Vidui Maaser is a declaration that I believe in myself and my abilities to realize the potential You see in me.

And that is why *Vidui* and *Busha* (guilt) are essential components of repairing and rectifying our relationship with *Hashem*. For the *Rambam (Hilchot Teshuva, Perek 7)*, *Busha*, feeling ashamed, or guilty, is a necessary component of *teshuva*. Guilt is a pre-requisite to real change and without it, change is inauthentic, counterfeit and short-lived.

Teshuva is real work, perhaps the hardest work we ever do and that is the work of change. We cannot hope to change and we cannot begin to change if we do not acknowledge that what we did was beneath us, and deserving of feeling guilt.

Our parents and grandparents had an expression – *pas nischt* – to describe behavior, conduct, an appearance or a personal choice that is unworthy and unacceptable.

If we don't feel at least a tinge of guilt, if we don't sense at least a hint of personal embarrassment for mistakes we have made and errors in judgement, how can we know that we truly regret the misdeeds?

Guilt is the affirmation that a line has been crossed, a boundary has been violated, and that such conduct was simply unworthy of me.

Emphatically declaring to G-d that I nailed it is not egotistical. It's not arrogant. It's implicitly saying that in the areas I didn't make the grade – I can and will strive to.

The same is true with guilt. Guilt is good. It's a wake-up call that you're not where you ought to be in aspiring to fulfilling the unique mission Hashem has for you. Don't be scared of it. Embrace it.

As much as it pains me to confess, I must. Mother knows best.