

## A Thought for the High Holy Days (aka Days of Awe/Days of Awesomeness)

Over the years, I've found that a good number of people are familiar with the teaching that if you have asked forgiveness of someone three times, you need not ask them for forgiveness again. Not only that, the great teacher Rambam says, "that person who did not forgive-he is the sinner." The idea is that there is a limit to how many times a person should have to ask for someone's forgiveness.

Can you picture this scenario? You go to someone after recognizing that you have badly hurt them and you verbalize this in front of the person (your spouse, your friend, your parent). That is not easy to do. It takes a good deal of strength as well as a strong desire to repair the relationship. In spite of all that, you are turned away, unforgiven. Then you try two more times and you are rejected. It is terribly sad.

Interestingly, most often when people bring up this teaching, they focus on the fact that the person who isn't willing to forgive has now done something wrong. It is as if we are saying, 'well, I may have done something wrong, but now you have too.' Needless to say, the spirit behind this is not our goal.

In truth, it would be better if we internalized the next teaching of Rambam regarding teshuva/repentance. He says, "It is forbidden for a person to be cruel and not make amends; instead, a person should get appeased easily and get angry slowly. And at the moment when the sinner asks for forgiveness—forgive with a whole heart and a desirous soul."

And just in case you are thinking about how badly or frequently this person has harmed you, Rambam goes on "And even if he pained him and sinned against him many times, he should not take revenge or hold a grudge."

Some people enter the holidays knowing where to focus. Their background gives them a fluency with the ideas and words of the season. For others, perhaps this teaching might serve as a focal point or a kavana, something which directs you over the course of these days. Teshuva is among the most powerful tools that we have for transforming our lives. It can't be used as a tool for withholding forgiveness. Yes, Rambam says that if that person refuses to forgive you three times, they are now to blame. But the second teaching is critical because it speaks to you when you think you have the upper-hand. Often (perhaps too

often) we think that people should be apologizing to us; after all, we didn't do anything wrong! Rambam is talking to you---be ready to forgive; don't be cruel; be appeased easily and move on "with a whole heart." If you are looking for a core idea of the coming holidays, one which you can carry with you into every relationship in your life, you should look no further. It is the work of a lifetime.