



28TH YAHRZEIT OF

RABBI JOSEPH SOLOVEITCHIK ZT"l

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt"l passed away on the 18th of Nissan. OU Israel's Torah Tidbits features two articles in this edition that share his unique teachings and contribution to the Klal Yisrael. May the Rav's memory be a blessing.



Candid Confessions

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider

It is axiomatic in *halacha* and Jewish practice that *vidui*, confession, is necessary in order to repent. A number of sources in the Torah substantiate its centrality:

Arguably, the earliest source for the obligation to confess can be traced back to the laws of *karbanot*, sacrifices, in which the person bringing his offering to the Courtyard leans on the animal and confesses. The Ramban (5:5) points out that this confession is a prototype for all sins and “to all dying people that they require confession before death.”

The decisive verse that speaks directly of its necessity says: “If a man or woman commits any of the sins of man...they must confess the sin they committed” (Numbers 5:6-7). The Rambam codifies this as law in the first halacha of the Laws of Repentance: “This refers to verbal confession. This confession is a positive commandment” (1:1).

The Ramban also argued that the passage at the end of the Torah which states, “For this commandment that I command you this today - “*it is not hidden from you and it is not distant*” (Devarim 30:11) - is referring to the mitzvah of *teshuva*. The Ramban proves that this is the case based on the verse stating that it is a mitzvah that is “*in your mouth*” (ibid, 30:14) - which refers to the integral component of the mitzvah - *vidui*.

Why is *Vidui* integral to actualizing *teshuva*? Noteworthy is the Rambam who went so far as to rule that repentance is incomplete if *vidui*, confession, has not been recited.

Two Reasons for *Vidui*'s Indispensability:

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt"l drew a comparison to the area of halacha of property law where words that are in one's heart, that is ideas that remain unarticulated, are not words at all and are of no significance (“*devarim she'balev ainan devarim*”, *Kiddushin 49b*). “Feelings, emotions, thoughts and ideas crystallize only after explicit verbal expression. Man knows and thinks many ideas which he cannot bring to his lips. Man can construct many psychological defenses within himself, refusing to acknowledge harsh reality. *Vidui* forces man to admit the facts as they really are, to express the painful truth.” (“Chumash

Mesoras HaRav', Sefer Vayikra, p.23)

In this context the The Rav quoted an intriguing passage from the Talmud: After the passing of Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi, the preeminent rabbinic leader of his day, an informal edict was promulgated: Whoever states that Rebbe died shall be impaled with a sword (Ketubot 104a). The stark reality of his death was so painful that one could not bring himself to hear the truth expressed verbally. Man buries the truth as long as the truth is not verbalized. (Ibid. p. 24).

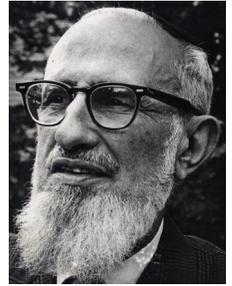
There is another aspect, suggested the Rav, that makes *vidui* so vital to *teshuva*. In short, it is terribly painful to admit facts as they really are (*On Repentance*, p. 95). "To tear down the screen, to put into words what our hearts have already determined" is often agonizing. However it is precisely a "deep cleaning" that is needed in order to come to terms with our faults and transform ourselves. The Rambam in his formulation of the *vidui* adds the striking term, *boshti*, I am embarrassed (*Hilchot Teshuva* 1:1). Feeling that shame and in this context is cathartic and propels us to make lasting change. This kind of pain is cleansing. There is a sacrifice on the altar; this is a sacrifice which involves breaking of the will "a torturous negation of human nature" (Ibid. 95).

Rabbi Soloveitchik's sister, Shulamith Meiselman, in her memorable memoir about her upbringing in the Soloveitchik home in Lithuania describes her father, Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik zt"l, delivering his addresses on Shabbat Shuva before Yom Kippur. He would admonish

the people of the town "for the evil they committed, for turning away from the path of righteousness, for not caring for the poor, the orphans, and the widows." She then commented that although her father rebuked his flock at the same time he would assure them that God is merciful and gracious and never forsakes the sinner. ('The Soloveitchik Heritage', Meiselman, pp.145-6)

Rabbi Soloveitchik's followed in his fathers footsteps. In discussing the topic of *vidui*

Rabbi Soloveitchik was quick to emphasize God's everlasting patience and mercy: The Talmud wonders why the verse states God's name twice, "The Lord, the Lord..." (Rosh Hashanah 17b).



Rabbeinu Tam (Tosafot, *ad loc.*) interpreted to mean two separate qualities, the first "Lord" indicating God who is there before man sins, and the second "Lord" indicating God who is there after man sins.

"When man sins, he creates a distance between himself and God...The end result of sinning is the daring out, as it were, of the Holy Presence. But who, then, will take care of the sinner after the Holy One removes Himself and the sinner is left alone?...Who will extend a helping hand to rescue him from the quicksand into which he has sunk? ('On Repentance', pp.84-85)

The Rav quoted from the High Holiday prayers: "He extends a hand to sinners and His right arm stretches forth to re-

ceive the penitent.” “The Lord, the Lord” according to Rabbi Soloveitchik suggests that God is distanced from the sinner. But the *Shechina*, the loving and motherly attributes of God always remains ready and desirous to help the sinner return (Ibid, p 86). ■

Torah Tidbits review of Rav Aaron Adler’s *Seventy Conversations in Transit*

Reviewed by Rabbi David Shapiro



As the 28th *yahrtzeit* (18 Nisan) of Rav Soloveitchik (“the Rov”) approaches, we will be enriched spiritually by contemplating his continuing influence on our religious lives, both collectively as members of the *Dati-Le’umi* or Modern Orthodox community, and individually for those readers of Torah Tidbits who were privileged to benefit from the Rov’s pedagogy and/or personal kindness.

A recently published book will help each of us re-encounter the Rov vividly. Rav Aaron Adler – the rav of Beit HaKenesset Ohel Nehamah (in Katamon) and a highly-valued teacher of OU-sponsored *shi’urim* – is widely appreciated as a loyal student of Rav Soloveitchik who not only presents his rebbe’s Torah insights lucidly but recounts enthralling anecdotes drawn from his many years of weekly contact with the Rov. Rabbi Adler has now published a reconstruction of seventy conversations as he drove the Rov from the airport to Yeshiva University each Tuesday morning during

the years 1974 – 1977.

The book is aptly titled “Seventy Conversations in Transit” (Urim Publications and OU Press, 2021) and Rabbi Adler reports these in such an engaging manner that the reader feels as if he is in the car with them.

The topics include subjects of formal *halakhah* (“Pre-Natal Genetic Testing” [p. 32], “Purchasing Hametz Products after Pesah” [p. 50]); topics of *hashkafah* - philosophy and ethics - (“Torah Education for Women” [p. 89], “Business Ethics” [p. 132], “His Personal Philanthropy” [p. 163]); as well as issues of public policy (“Soviet Jewry Rallies” [p.123]; “Private Conversations with a Dutch Cardinal” [p. 154]).

A recurrent theme throughout many of the units is the image of Rav Soloveitchik’s generosity of spirit. Although “his stature was nothing less than royal and majestic” [p. 143], he related to all people with respect and with an appreciation for their inherent dignity. The following two examples illustrate this:

1. [p. 138] Commenting to Rabbi Adler on the Talmudic dictum (*Berakhot* 7a and *Megillah* 15a) that one should regard with significance a blessing received from even an ordinary person, the Rov said: “sixty percent of success in all of life’s endeavors – health, financial, and social – can be attributed to the person’s will to succeed. The problem is that life is an obstacle course making the realization of one’s success that much more difficult. When another person greets someone with wishes for good health, for example, it removes one of those obstacles in life’s erratic pathways. The