

# **High Holy Days Concepts of Maimonides**

## **Excerpts from Hilkhot Teshubah**

*Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon z”l, also known as the Rambam or Maimonides, was born in Cordoba, Spain on March 30, 1135, and died in Egypt on December 13, 1204. He was a rabbi, physician, and philosopher in Spain, Morocco and Egypt during the Middle Ages. He was the preeminent medieval Jewish philosopher.*

### **Chapter One**

Halakha 1: If a person has transgressed any one of the Torah precepts, affirmative or negative, willfully or unintentionally, he must confess before God, blessed be he, when repenting and turning away from his sin; for it is written: “If a man or woman commits any of the sins into which men fall... they must confess their sinful act” (Numbers 5:6-7); This means verbal confession....How does one confess? He says: “O Lord, I have sinned, I have done evil, I have rebelled against you and have done this... I regret now and am ashamed of my acts; I will never do it again.” This represents the essential part of confession. The more any one confesses the more praise he deserves. Similarly, those who have to bring sin-offerings, or guilt-offerings, are not forgiven through those offerings for sins committed unintentionally or willfully unless they repent and confess, as it is written: “He must confess the sin he has committed” (Leviticus 5:5). So too, those sentenced to death by the court and those sentenced to lashes are not forgiven through death or lashes unless they repent and confess. Furthermore, one who has injured a person or damaged his property, even though he pays what he owes him, is not pardoned unless he confesses and resolves never to commit such an offense again, as it is written: “If a man or woman commits any of the sins...” (Numbers 5: 6).

Halakha 3: At this time, when the Temple no longer exists, and we have no atonement altar, there is nothing left but repentance. Repentance atones for all transgressions. Even if a man was wicked throughout his life and repented at the end, we must not mention anything about his wickedness to him, as it is written: “A wicked man’s wickedness shall not bring about his downfall when he gives up his wickedness” (Ezekiel 33:12). *Yom Kippur* itself atones for those who repent, as it is written: “Atonement shall be made for you on this day” (Leviticus 16:30).

## **Chapter Two**

Halakha 1: Perfect repentance is where an opportunity presents itself to the offender for repeating the offense and he refrains from committing it because of his repentance and not out of fear or physical inability....If, however, one repents only in his old age, when he is no longer able to do what he used to do, his repentance, though not the best, will nevertheless do him some good. Even if a person transgressed all his life and repented on the day of his death and died during his repentance, all his sins are pardoned, as it is written: “Before the sun grows dark, and the light goes from moon and stars, and the clouds gather after rain” (Ecclesiastes 12:2), that is, the day of death. This implies that if he remembers his Creator and repents before death, he is forgiven.

Halakha 3: Anyone who makes a verbal confession without resolving in his heart to abandon his sin is like one who takes a ritual bath while grasping a defiling reptile. The bath is useless unless he first casts the reptile away.

Halakha 9: Repentance and *Yom Kippur* effect atonement only for sins committed against God, as when one has eaten forbidden food; ...sins committed against a fellow man, as when a person either injured or cursed or robbed his neighbor, he is never pardoned unless he compensates his neighbor and makes an apology. Even though he has made

the compensation, the wrongdoer must appease the injured person and ask his pardon. Even if he only annoyed him with words he must apologize and beg his forgiveness.

Halakha 10: One must not show himself cruel by not accepting an apology; he should be easily pacified, and provoked with difficulty. When an offender asks his forgiveness, he should forgive wholeheartedly and with a willing spirit. Even if he has caused him much trouble wrongfully, he must not avenge himself, he must not bear a grudge. This is the way of the stock of Israel and their upright hearts....Concerning the Gibeonites who refused to forgive and be appeased, it is written: “The Gibeonites did not belong to the people of Israel” (II Samuel 21:2).

### **Chapter Three**

Halakha 4: Even though the sounding of the *shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah* is a biblical decree, it has an intimation, as if to say: “Arise from your slumber, you who are asleep; wake up from your deep sleep, you who are fast asleep; search your deeds and repent; remember your Creator. Those of you who forget the truth because of passing vanities, indulging throughout the year in the useless things that cannot profit you nor save you, look into your souls, amend your ways and deeds. Let everyone give up his evil way and his bad purpose.” Everybody should, therefore, regard himself throughout the year as half innocent and half guilty; so too, he should consider the entire world as half innocent and half guilty. If then he commits one additional sin he presses down the scale of guilt against himself and the entire world, and causes his destruction; if, on the other hand, he performs a good deed he presses down the scale of merit in his favor and that of the entire world, and causes salvation and deliverance to reach him and his fellow men, as it is written: “The just man is the foundation of the world” (Proverbs 10:25); that is, he who acts justly presses down the scale of merit in favor of the world and saves it.

For this reason the whole house of Israel has formed a custom to engage in the performance of charity and good deeds between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* to a much larger extent than during the entire year. Besides, during these ten days they are all accustomed to rise in the night and to pray and supplicate in the synagogue until daylight.