

The Mitzvah of Confession

“A man or a woman if they commit of all the sins of a person, to transgress a transgression against G-od, and that soul shall be guilty. And they shall confess their sins that they committed.” This is the Torah source for the mitzvah of confession and return to God, which is how the Rambam opens his Laws of Return to God: *“All mitzvahs in the Torah...if a person transgressed one of them...when he returns to God and returns from his sin he is obligated to confess before God, blessed is He.”*

The Rambam counts three stages: *“when he returns to God and returns from his sin he is obligated to confess.”* The first stage, *“when he returns to God”* is his recognition of the fact that he has sinned, leading to a feeling of deep remorse. In the soul, this feeling is from the *sefirah* of **binah, understanding**: *“And his soul will understand and return.”* This is the stage of **submission** in the soul.

The second stage, *“and he returns from his sin”*, is a complete abandonment of the sin alongside a firm resolution not to go back to sinning. At this stage, the *binah* extends to the *sefirah* of **gevurah, might**, as in the verse, *“I am binah, gevurah is mine.”* This is the stage at which the person overpowers his evil inclination: *“Who is a gibor/mighty? He who conquers his evil inclination.”* After the initial stage of submission, the former sinner has reached the stage of **separation**, during which he separates himself from the reality of the sin.

The third stage is *“he is obligated to confess.”* The first two stages take place in the person’s inner world. But the *mitzvah* required at the end is the act of speech, *“verbal confession”*. At this stage, the *sefirah* of *binah* reaches its farthest span – the *sefirah* of **hod, splendor**. In Hebrew, the root ‘*hod*’ also means ‘to confess’. After the submission and the separation, this is the stage of **sweetening**. The speech sweetens the person’s inner storm and atonement

follows on its heels (as in our verses, in which confession precedes the bringing of the sacrifice).

The Rambam emphasizes that the confession is *before God, blessed is He.*" After the depth of remorse and abandonment of the sin, it is only with the simple, sincere, verbal confession that we are truly standing and speaking with God: "*We have sinned **before you***". This is the superiority of *hod*, which is like an echo (*hed*) that returns and strikes the deepest of depths.