

Good Evening everyone,

Thank you for coming to my Bat Mitzvah celebration. I can't tell you how good it feels to be standing here on this special occasion, I'm so glad I canceled that dental appointment. A Bat Mitzvah is an age-old tradition to learn and teach some Torah in honor of becoming a Bat Mitzvah. I have chosen the subject of Teshuvah (which means REPENTANCE) because Rosh Hashanah is only a week away and that is the beginning of the 10 days of Repentance or in Hebrew the Aseret Yeh-may Teshuva עשרת ימי תשובה. We will review some of the concepts of Teshuva through the structure of Who, What, When and Why. And we will also try to use real examples or case studies from the news or reality television that will help us demonstrate the points. This may not be exactly PG, parental guidance may be required. Children should be aware that some of these cases are not suitable for children or even adults, but hopefully we can learn from their mistakes.

The **Who of Teshuvah, who does this mitzvah (a mitzvah is a good deed) apply** to: The simple answer is everyone, because everyone makes mistakes. The Hassidic masters say that Teshuvah should also be done on Mitzvoth because sometimes you may not do them 100% perfectly and Teshuvah is a process by which you improve all the time. We see a similar idea in dance, sometimes we do a dance routine and you did it well, but the teacher tells you can do even better.

One of the most dangerous ways of thinking is for a person to believe that they don't have to do any Teshuvah; they don't have to improve or get better. Those people are particularly likely to get into big trouble. A good example of this is Abby Lee Miller, the famous dance instructor on Dance Mom's. She always believes she does it the right way, and that no matter how badly or hurtfully she behaves; she thinks it the right way to be. She always gets mad at both the Mom's and the kids, but she is completely blind to the fact that it is a problem.

If you don't want to end up like Abby Lee you have to be open to Teshuvah.

What is Teshuvah? The Rambam had said that it takes three steps

1) First you have to recognize that you have done a sin. Actually this is much harder than it sounds, because our brains are programmed to tell

us we are doing the right thing. This little section is a little audience participation experiment. What does it feel like to be wrong? [Take answers from audience]:

- 1) Bad
- 2) Embarrassing etc.
- 2) That is what it feels like to know that you are wrong. However if you ask what does it feel like to be wrong,? It *FEELS* exactly the same as it does to be right. So if when we are wrong we feel as if we are right we need help to know when we are wrong.

The Torah tells the story of the creation of the first couple

“And the LORD God said: 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper to oppose him’ or in Hebrew Ezer Keh-neg- dough.'

- 3) . When G-d created woman it was עֶזֶר כְּהֶנֶגְדוּחַ Ezer Keh-neg- dough a helper to be against him. Which means so that they can correct you when you are wrong (your wife is always right!). The very first friendship was so that humans would have a second opinion to help them see a truer picture of the world and point out when they make mistakes or a sin, otherwise we would all end up going through life thinking we are just perfect, why change.
- 2) Maimonides (May-Mon-Ideez) outlines the next three steps in the Teshuva-repentance process.
 - 1) The first step is abandoning your sin. This means that you have to uproot from the very source. So for example a gambler has to get rid of his casino card and close down all his gambling website accounts. An alcoholic has to get all of the wine, beer and hard liquor out of the house. One of the best examples of the danger of not getting far away from your sins is Aaron Hernandez, the tight end for the New England Patriots. AARON HER-NAN-DEZ had a great opportunity to get away from his sins of gang involvement and be a part of one of the greatest NFL football teams ever, the New England patriots. However, he never gave up his connections to gang members, the gangs kept him involved in guns, violence and revenge. Aaron Hernandez was convicted of murder earlier this year, which has ruined his life and career.
 - 2) Rambam also says that you have to have regret over the past. An example of this is Paula Deen. Paula Deen was reported to have used racist language against a minority group in the United States. Many people called for her to be removed from food network programming and her network and her sponsors started to distance themselves. She made a very emotional apology for saying hurtful things and she

has been able to rehabilitate herself and return to food companies and television because of this apology. This is a good example of regret over the past, because she was able to identify what she did wrong and she even apologized in a very public way. Generally, Judaism does not believe in public confession. But if you hurt many people and it is impossible to track them all down, then Judaism says that it is appropriate to make the apology public so that you can reach as many people as possible.

- 3) The third step of the Rambam is to promise to never return to the sin again. This is actually very difficult to do. Because sometimes a person is addicted to their sin, like an alcoholic or a gambler. Even those of us without formal addictions might make strong promises and not live up to them. Rambam says that you should promise to the point that, “it has to be so true in your heart that until you know that G-d himself could testify about you that you have scrubbed the sin out completely.” That is obviously very hard work. There was once a time when I used a hot glue gun on the counter and I was therefore responsible to peel it off, it took about half an hour to peel it off. It took a lot of work to remove all of that. I think this is a good metaphor for how sure you have to be. I wanted to make sure that my mom would not see any glue, when you get rid of your sin, you want to scrub it away so that G-d who also represents truth can testify that there is not trace of the sinful behavior left.

When of Teshuvah

Teshuva can be done anytime, it can even be done moments before a person dies. In fact there is a special confession that Jews do when they are on their deathbed. That is a bit of a depressing thought, because a) this is bat mitzvah and b) “(Say with attitude) really, do we want to delay improving ourselves until just before we die.”

On that note, G-d gives us a time of year that we are especially responsible for Teshuva. The days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), and it is just around the corner.

Why?

We do Teshuvah so that we can actually become better people. Do you know the character of Uncle MASH-ETY in the movie Spy Kids? I assume

all my friends know who I am talking about, but for you Grown-ups his name is Danny Trejo and he has been in about 200 movies including Desperado and Anchorman. Danny had a long criminal history before he became an actor; in fact he had been in every prison in the state of California.

Obviously he turned his life around and gave up his life of crime, which included many, many robberies. Lets imagine that he never changed his ways and never did Teshuvah. Then he would probably be in some prison somewhere. He might even die there, and that would certainly be a waste of a life.

In fact one way of looking at Teshuvah is thinking about your life as very important and all of the abilities you have as gifts to be used wisely. In fact there is a prayer that we say just before Yom Kippur that is called Tefilah Zakkah. And I am going to read a few sections of this prayer for my bat mitzvah you will see that the prayer uses every part of the body and compares the good that can be done with some of the less positive things that we do with those very same body parts. Listen closely

Read the Prayers.

You will also note that the last lines **that I read from the Tefilah Zakkah are a change for me to forgive other people.** This is also an important lesson in Teshuvah, because one of the best motivators to do Teshuvah is to see how it feels to forgive another person. This period of time is not only for getting forgiveness but also for giving forgiveness to others.

I would like to thank my wonderful family and friends who were able to fly in for my special day, I truly appreciate it! I would also like to thank Rabbi Rosenblatt for helping me with everything and I would like to thank my amazing parents, I couldn't do this without you. Lastly, thanks to my big bro...[pause]....for what? I dunno!!!