



A lesson from
Aleph Learning Institute

The Month of Cheshvan

Lesson 2 // Series 4

Throughout the 7 year **Shmitta** (sabbatical) cycle, Jews living in the land of Israel were required to bring a variety of tithes from their produce, to be distributed to the priests, levites and the poor, as well as widows and orphans. After successfully fulfilling this obligation, one was commanded to stand up and proudly recite (Rashi Deut. 26:13 in a low voice) **Vidui Maaser (confession)**: I have done as you told me. I have given the appropriate portions to the Levite, to the convert, to the orphan and to the widow. I have not failed in my duties. I am a success. We tell G-d bluntly that we perfectly implemented all of His commandments on this matter. Why the self-praise? **Why call it a confession?**

In its classic sense confession means that we admit guilt and ask forgiveness. Yet in this case, we state that we have done everything right. Imagine you approach your spouse and say: I want to make a confession to you. You continue: I want to confess today, that I am a wonderful, incredible, sensitive, kind, caring and passionate spouse. I have been loyal to all my responsibilities. Alas, I am the perfect spouse. **Is this a confession?**

When the Talmud is looking to learn how to behave in self-praise, it looks to Vidui Maaser which is a prime example of self-praise. Talmud Tractate Sotah 32b: Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai stated: "A person ought to speak in a low voice when saying his/her own praise, and in a loud voice when saying his own disgrace.

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook: The Torah gave us a method of encouragement. That a person ought to be elated in verbal acknowledgement of the positive deeds which he/she has done. In order that he may strengthen his heart in Divine service and rejoice over his honorable actions [in Torah and mitzvot]. A person should not view oneself as wicked or inadequate even in a situation when he has truly done his duty. It is proper to find soul satisfaction and be full with happiness and serenity. Indeed, just as there is benefit in confessing sins for the rectification of the soul, likewise it is beneficial that at set times those who serve G-d in the proper way should confess positive deeds, in order that they may rejoice in their hearts and be strengthened in their G-dly path of life. In "**Song of Songs**": "**I am dark and beautiful.**" These are two interconnected sides necessary for all personal growth: I am dark, I may have succumbed to darkness, but I am inherently beautiful.

To truly confess a mistake or sin, requires that I can sometimes tell G-d: I am good. I am great. I have done what you wanted. I have not transgressed. And because I am capable of doing things correctly, I can sincerely regret my actions when I fail to do so. The Maaser declaration is called confession because it enables and gives meaning to the confession of repentance. Rabbi Sholom Dov Ber of Lubavitch, Igrot Kodesh, letter 469 states: **Just as one must know one's personal shortcomings, one must know one's personal talents and his/her ability to achieve.**

In education, this concept is vital, both at home and in the classroom. When your child comes home with a report card, with mixed marks, what should your response be? Focus on your child's strengths and success. Try this: My dear, I see you are excelling in... You earned an A in

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www.AlephLearningInstitute.org | alephjli@gmail.com

Aleph Learning Institute
Chabad of Maryland, Inc. (tax deductible)
6701 Old Pimlico RD Baltimore, MD 21209
ATT: Mrs. Rochel Kaplan, Director

Thank you!

cleanliness and organization, and scored high in cooperation and sportsmanship. It is obvious that when you put your mind to something, you are immensely successful. You have thereby shown your child in a genuine way that he/she is good and special and capable. With this standard he/she can believe in the possibility of achieving success.

Here is a story that the **Baal Shem Tov (Besht)** once shared, one of the most important ideas behind his teachings.

The Baal Shem Tov once visited a town in which the people complained that their cantor behaved strangely. On Yom Kippur, he would chant the Al Cheit, confession of sins, in a merry melody, rather than in a somber tune. When questioned by The Besht, the cantor explained: "Rebbe, a king has many servants who serve him. Some of them prepare the royal meals, others serve the food, while others place the royal crown upon the king's head, and yet others run the affairs of the country. Each rejoices in his work and the privilege to serve and be close to the king. Now the palace also has a janitor, charged with the duty of removing rubbish and filth from the palace. The janitor deals with this every day. He too is happy because he is also serving the king. He is removing the dirt and ensuring that the palace is beautiful for the king. He is not focused on the dirt, rather the beauty surrounding him! When a Jew sins, it is the concept of dirt on the soul. In confessing sins, it is not the guilt, darkness and negativity that is the focus; it is the holiness and beauty of the soul! He/she is removing layers of dirt that are eclipsing the soul and allowing his inner light to shine in its full glory. Is this not a reason to sing and rejoice?"

Dear Friend,

We have now begun the Jewish month of Cheshvan, referred to as Mar-Cheshvan, "bitter Cheshvan," as it is a month bereft of holidays. With the arrival of the month of Cheshvan we enter a new phase in the Jewish year, representing a transition from a month of festivals to the ordinary service of the year. During Tishrei we welcomed the New Year and stood before G-d in judgment, which was followed by the joyous days of Sukkot. But now Cheshvan has arrived and our mission is to carry the holiness of the month of Tishrei with us as we re-enter the "real world."

Chasidic thought describes this mission as "**V'Yaakov Halach L'darko - and Yaakov went on his way.**" The name Yaakov [Jacob] represents the entire Jewish nation. Just as Jacob had to leave the house of his father, his source of spirituality, so too do we leave the spiritual and festive month of Tishrei. And just as Jacob was able to not only take with him the lessons of his father's house, but utilize his travels to further his spiritual growth, **we too take with us all that we have gained during the holidays like luggage to unpack throughout the year.**

With this Out of The Box Lesson you have received a handy bag from Aleph Learning Institute.

Stop and think about your daily experiences. Record something positive and noteworthy that you have done, as a personal "confession". You can also include good resolutions for the year. Or use the bag for small change to contribute to "Make Change" toward the Associated or any other charity. When you realize how good and capable you are, you might ask yourself the question, why am I not living up to my potential?

Sincerely,

Rochel Kaplan, Director Aleph Learning Institute