



In his introduction to *Hilkhot Teshuva*, Maimonides defines the obligation of *teshuva* as follows: "The sinner must return from his sin before God and confess" ("*She-yashuv ha-chotei mei-chet'o lifnei Hashem ve-yitvadeh*").

Maimonides requires that one repent *lifnei Hashem*, "before God." It is not enough for a person to acknowledge, "I have sinned"; he must come before the Almighty, as it were, and declare in His presence that He has failed, that he has betrayed God, and he now wishes to return. Some writers have suggested that this requirement mentioned by Maimonides – that one confess *lifnei Hashem* – forms the basis of the *halakha* codified in the *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 607:3), based on the Gemara (Yoma 87b), that one must stand for the recitation of *viduy* (confession). Just as one must stand during the *amida* prayer (*Hilkhot Tefila* 5:1-2), when he is to "see himself as he stands in the presence of the *Shekhina*" (*Hilkhot Tefila* 4:16), so does *Halakha* require standing during *viduy*, as one repents "before God." Speaking directly to the Almighty demands that one stand with reverence and respect, and therefore the declaration of *viduy* naturally requires standing, insofar as it is made in God's presence.

The reason for this requirement likely stems from the kind of experience the process of *teshuva* demands. Maimonides formulates the following text that an individual must recite when declaring *viduy*: "Please, God: I have sinned, transgressed and committed an offense before You, and I did such-and-such; I hereby regret and feel ashamed over my actions, and I will never repeat this action" (*Hilkhot Teshuva* 1:1). This formulation includes the familiar three components of confession, regret and future resolve, meaning, the acknowledgment of guilt, expression of remorse, and a commitment to never repeat the given offense. Significantly, however, Maimonides includes in this declaration the term *boshti* – "I feel ashamed." The process of repentance requires not merely confession, regret and future resolve, but also an element of shame. To regret an act means to wish it had never been committed; shame means that one cannot come to terms with the fact that it had been committed. The experience of shame is far more powerful than remorse; it carries with it a sense of failure and inadequacy that creates an almost incessant feeling of disgust with oneself.

It is for this reason, perhaps, that Maimonides demands confessing "before God." If a person commits a wrong against his fellow, he might feel perfectly at ease expressing his regret to a third party, but he will likely be too ashamed to approach the victim himself. When we recite *viduy*, this is precisely what *Halakha* demands: that we see ourselves as approaching God, the One whom we have betrayed, and confess to Him directly. This experience of shame will help ensure that we hold true to our promise never to repeat the offenses we committed, that our process of *teshuva* is sincere and wholehearted, and marks the onset of a period of spiritual growth and self-improvement.