

In a [Dvar Torah on Parashat Nitzavim](#), we discussed the distinction between the confession, ווידוי, of the individual versus that of the congregation or צבור. What is the purpose of the confession? What does it affect or repair? Why are those specific sins and acts included in the confession?

In the story of Genesis, the Torah describes the creation of the world and, as the final act, man. Why was man created? What role was he to play in the world created by Gd? The story of man's creation is divided into two segments. As Rabbi Soloveichik ZT"l explained, the original story of creation deals with man as individual, distinct and unconcerned with his fellow man. He strives for knowledge and self-growth. He has no need or room to include others in his journey, as life is a zero-sum game. He cannot stop to consider anyone else lest he stray from his mission and goal, to conquer creation, וכבשו.

The second story of creation describes man's recognition of his loneliness. He desires, indeed seeks, companionship. He recognizes how the rest of creation has been created, male and female, to share and work together. Everyone else has someone, but he does not. He alone has the ability to think, reason, appreciate what Gd has created. He has the power of speech but no one to converse with. His loneliness weighs heavily on him. He feels only half alive without a partner with whom he can share, grow, build with and seek to improve. With the arrival of Eve, his world changes. He can now begin to dream of building something beautiful and enduring, a community.

The Torah tells us that man was created in the image of Gd, בצלם אלקים. What does that mean? Both stories of creation of man are indicative of an aspect of Gd imbued in man. On the one hand, Gd is unique, אחד. He does not need anyone to help Him. It is absurd for man to consider approaching Gd, to partner with Him in this world. כי לא יראני האדם וחי. As we say in the שיר היחוד, Gd is all capable and did not seek or require assistance from anyone. On the other hand, Chazal tell us that Gd created the world as a vehicle for Him to manifest חסד, kindness to others. Gd desired to be a neighbor, שכן, of man, to interact with man and help

him grow and attain greatness. **טוה** does not exist in a vacuum. There can be no **טוה** unless there is a recipient of the kindness. Where Gd gives to man, man also gives to Gd. Man's contribution to the relationship is to thank and praise Gd and recognize the **טוה** Gd bestows upon him. In this regard, Gd needs man to form that loop of kindness and gratitude.

When we say Gd created man **בצלם אלקים**, we mean man was conceived with both aspects, man as unique individual and man as partner. He is to bring both aspects to his interaction with Gd as well as his fellow human being. On the one hand, he is to strive to conquer creation, to understand and comprehend as much of Gd's uniqueness he possibly can. On the other hand, he is to show kindness, to act with **טוה**, towards his fellow man in order that humanity collectively, communally, reach its potential. Both are manifestations of **צלם אלקים**, as individual and community. Both must be pursued.

In order to guarantee that man fulfill his mission, ground rules were put in place. At the outset, man was commanded not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, the **עץ הדעת**. In his role of individual, in his drive to conquer creation, man must realize that he has certain limitations. He should never confuse himself with the Creator. There were other limitations imposed upon man, the member of society. For example, taking another's life is the antithesis of the *raison d'être* of creation, **טוה**, and was forbidden. Stealing was forbidden as it tears at the very fabric of society. Basic rules of law and societal norms were laid down so that the societal image of Gd, **צלם אלקים**, could be maintained.

Beginning with Adam's perfidy and the idolatry and wickedness of the subsequent generations, man broke his part of the bargain. When he refused to acknowledge his part in the communal error of eating from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge and instead cast blame on his partner Eve, man broke the communal covenant and attempted to wrap himself in his individual mantle of **צלם אלקים**. Gd cast him out of Eden and that point as it says (Genesis 3-22):

ויאמר ד" אלהים הן האדם היה כאחד ממנו לדעת טוב ורע ועתה פן יישלח ידו ולקח גם מעץ החיים ואכל וחי לעולם

Gd says that man, who has removed himself from the communal **צלם אלקים** and covenant and is interested only in himself, will eventually rebel against Gd and seek to view himself as an equal, **כביכול**, with Gd. That would abrogate the individual aspect of **צלם אלקים**. He must be cast out, for his own benefit, before he crosses that red line and is punished most severely.

By creating idols and fashioning their own gods, the people violated their individual **צלם אלקים**, their obligation to maintain the boundary and limitation between Gd and man. By attempting to compete with Gd, they negated His uniqueness that was part of their own **צלם אלקים**. Chazal tell us the fate of Noah's generation, **דור המבול**, was sealed by the rampant theft and moral corruption. They abrogated the foundation of **חן**, the communal aspect of **צלם אלקים**. At the end of Parashat Breishit, The Torah says (Genesis 6:5-6):

וירא יהוה כי רבה רעת האדם בארץ וכל־יצר מחשבת לבו רק רע כל־היום וינחם יהוה כי־עשה את־האדם בארץ ויתעצב אל־לבו

Gd lamented that man had abrogated all aspects of **צלם אלקים**. He replaced the fundamentals of **צלם אלקים** with all kinds of terrible ideas and thoughts. After destroying the world through the flood, He sought to try again with Noah, but again was not fully successful. The Generation of Division, **דור הפלגה**, was noteworthy in that on the one hand, there was peace and harmony among the people. They seemed to grasp the communal aspect of **צלם אלקים**. However, they attempted to rebel against Gd and corrupted their individual and communal covenants. They were scattered and Chazal tell us they have no share in the world to come as punishment for that abrogation.

Which brings us to the story of Sodom. Already in Parashat Lech Lcha, the Torah introduces us to the wicked people of Sodom and the surrounding cities (Genesis 13:13):

ואנשי סדם רעים וחטאים ליהוה מאד

Rashi comments:

רעים בגופם וחטאים בממונם לה" מאד יודעים רבונם ומתכונים למרוד בו

The residents of the 5 towns completely abrogated their צלם אלקים, from both the individual and communal perspective. They purposefully rebelled against Gd even though they recognized Him. Indeed, Lot was willing to throw in his lot with them, as the Midrash says he came to reject Abram and his Gd, an attitude that perfectly matched that of his new neighbors. The people of Sodom stood out for their abrogation of the communal covenant. Chazal tell us (סנהדרין קט ב) how wicked they were to guests who were unfortunate enough to find themselves in their midst. And how they cruelly tortured the young girl who took pity on a pauper, by covering her with honey and inciting the hornets to sting her to death. The Gemara relates how perverted and corrupt Sodom's justice system was, where the innocent were compelled to compensate the guilty.

When the angels came to Lot's house, the entire population of the city encircled Lot's house and demanded he hand over the visitors to them. There was not even a single dissenting voice among them, from the youngest to the oldest. This was a group that forfeited their individual צלם אלקים and hid behind the veil of their version of a communal covenant. They utterly corrupted the real communal covenant that was to be built on kindness and adherence to law and order. They could not be saved. Their attitude is reminiscent of communist societies where the individual forfeits his individuality to the community and the government

perpetrates heinous acts in the name of the community. It is the ultimate forfeiture and abrogation of צלם אלקים.

Let us now return to our original questions regarding why there are 2 confessions, ווידוי, recited by the individual and the congregation and why each appears at different points of the service. On Yom Kippur we are judged on both aspects of צלם אלקים, individual and communal. We approach Gd as individuals, confessing how we distorted the individual צלם אלקים Gd implanted in each of us. We rebelled against Gd and abrogated our individual covenant with Gd. The individual's confession, אשמנו בגדנו מרדנו וכו, and the various על חטא, the ways we broke our individual covenant with Gd. We confess how we strayed instead of following the path He set for each of us. The confession of the individual matches the manner in which he sinned: alone and quietly, after he has poured his heart out to Gd.

On the High Holidays we also must atone for our sins as members of the communal covenant. We acted improperly towards our fellow man in abrogating the communal צלם אלקים. Where the communal covenant of צלם אלקים with Gd obligated us to act with חסד ודין, with kindness and justice, instead we lied, cheated, stole from our fellow man and corrupted the laws and norms that bind us together. We must confess our sins that abrogated the communal covenant, as a community, in unison, out loud. The communal confession is the focal point of the Communal Prayer, תפלת הצבור, and it is recited in the central part of the תפלת הצבור.

Copyright 2022, Rabbi Joshua Rapps. All rights reserved. Permission granted to print for individual use. Inclusion in and/or distribution via printed or electronic media is prohibited without permission of the author.