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I would like to thank the congregation for inviting me to speak today.

Today is Yom Kippur - the Day of Atonement. Around the world, Jews are confessing their sins and praying for absolution. Sin is not a pleasant sounding word. No one wants to look at themselves as a "sinner". In Hebrew, the generic term for sin is *chet*, which literally means "to make a mistake." We bristle at being called a sinner, but we all admit to making mistakes. Yom Kippur's central issue is how do we correct the mistakes of our past and avoid repeating them? If we can understand this, then we possess the key to unlocking an enormous reservoir of latent potential for greatness which should otherwise lie dormant. Tradition teaches that the path to find and correct our mistakes is a four step process, known as *teshuva* - literally returning to G-d.

The first step is *charata* - regret. Regret at making mistakes, not guilt of committing heinous transgressions. One would feel regret at loosing a wallet with a large sum of money. Similarly, *teshuva* requires us to regret the mistakes we have made - such as ignoring G-d's voice, hurting other people, and not helping the poor. Our mistakes can cause us to loose our self-respect, drive away close friends, and prevent us from being closer to G-d. In order to grow, we must first see that our mistakes have resulted in the loss of something we hold dear and important.

The second step is *aziva* - abandonment. Once we have identified our mistakes, we must abandon the rationalizations that allowed us to err. We are all geniuses when it comes to our ability to rationalize. The Einstein in all of us begins to surface. We are capable of the most convincing bits of intellectual dexterity, temporarily tying our minds in one convoluted knot after another, thereby enabling ourselves to do what we feel like doing instead of what we really want to. We all **want** to do what's right. Only sometimes we rationalize and do what we **feel** like instead. I have lost my wallet, or worse yet, my friend. How do I avoid making the same mistake? We must identify the rationalization, see what enticed us to transgress, and understand the basic untruth that is at the center of the rationalization. We can then stop the rationalization and halt the action it sanctioned. It's OK to make a mistake, as long as you learn from them and don't repeat them.

The third step of *teshuva* is *vidduy* - confession. In other words, "Go and say you're sorry." This is perhaps the most difficult of the steps. To confront those we have transgressed against, whether G-d or fellow person, and say "I'm sorry, I feel awful about what happened, it won't happen again - I

promise." makes our mistakes and the hurt they cause all to real. Confession turns a spotlight on our imperfections, allowing all to see them. But only by opening up our imperfections to examination can we correct them and improve ourselves.

The fourth step is *kabala* - resolve. Resolve to never repeat that particular mistake. Say what you mean - "I'm sorry" and mean what you say "it won't happen again." With this final act of resolve, we have returned to where we were before making our mistake.

The path of *teshuva* is open to all, Jew and Gentile alike. This afternoon's Haftorah, the Book of Jonah, clearly states that G-d is eager for the return of **all** his children, not just the Children of Israel. The Ninevites were enemies of Israel, but when they repented from their wickedness and returned to righteousness, G-d forgave them. We must not only encourage our fellow Jews to return to G-d and righteousness, but also the Gentile community as well.

Sometimes the requirements of *teshuva* require us to rid ourselves of old grudges and forgive those who have transgressed against us. But how can you forgive someone who has unknowingly hurt you? Jewish teachings are very clear: If someone has hurt you, you must tell them, and in a way that does not hurt them back, for that would be vengeance. For example, you must not remind them in public, even if that's how they hurt you. You must not rebuke them in such a way that they have no opportunity to save face, even if that's what they did to you. And you must not say to them: "I'm not going to do to you what you did to me because I'm nice", for that would be turning the knife.

Why shouldn't we do these almost irresistibly tempting things? For one reason, because Torah says not to, and for another, because we would root ourselves in the past if we do. If we withhold forgiveness and bear a grudge, we transform the hurt that's been done to us into something that we guard and nurse. Not quite willing to do the other person harm, not ready to forgive and forget, instead we just poison ourselves a little bit for the rest of our lives. We carry the injury around as part of our psyche, watching and nursing it, but not letting go.

Gradually, the grudge takes on a life of its own. Like a parasite, it feeds on our vitality and reminds us of unpleasant experiences long ago. It demands more and more of our thoughts, trapping us

in the hurtful past and preventing a part of ourselves from enjoying the present. In order for us to be fully in the present, it is sometimes necessary to nudge someone towards *teshuva*, so that we may forgive them and forget the past.

Remember that *teshuva* is a unique *mitzvah*. With other *mitzvot*, if you are lacking part of the *mitzvah*, you lack the whole thing. An etrog and lulav are made of four species, but if you are missing a single one, it is as if you have nothing. With regards to *teshuva*, every step you take brings you closer to where you want to be. No one can ever take away a step of progress, a step of growth or a step towards greatness.

Thank you.