**Individual and Collective in Repentance**

“‘How will the Jews atone for their sins?’ wondered King David. To which the Creator replied: ‘When suffering will befall the Jews because of their sins, they should gather before me in complete unity. Together they shall confess their sins and recite the order of the *Selichot*, and I will answer their prayers.’”(Mishna) This exemplifies the very essence of the Israeli nation which requires us to adopt a collective approach vis-a-vis everything, for the good and for the bad.

The *Selichot*(forgiveness)*,*communal prayers said during the High Holiday season, represent a special time of introspection and repentance. But what should we be asking forgiveness for? This special period delivers the realization that, collectively, *we* have been heading more toward separation than toward connection with others in our lives, and this is the sin for which we need to ask pardon.

This has important implications for the Days of Repentance between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. All our introspection—all we wish to reflect upon, examine, clarify, admit to, confess, seek pardon for—must also be carried out jointly and in full consideration of each and every member of the nation.

However, since we have been raised separately, we have been trained and encouraged to manage ourselves as individuals. As a consequence, we have grown distant from our communal beginnings and lost awareness of ourselves as a people. In other words, we have retreated from behaving as a society inspired, organized, and operated according to mutual guarantee.

The sensation that we are like the organs of a single body—the consciousness where each individual is not evaluated separately, but rather as an integral part of a healthy and fully functional whole—has degenerated. It behooves us to gradually awaken from this delusion of division and realize that we are being looked upon by others as a people, not as a collection of faction groups or separate individuals.

This shattering of our peoplehood is what we should ask forgiveness for, for ignoring the growing gaps between us, for forgetting what is expected of us as a people, and for our actual behavior that is out of sync with mutual guarantee.

There is no reason to be angry and reproach each other; there is no reason for arguing and using harsh words. Generally, such words achieve little, and often have the opposite effect. Take, for example, educating children. We raise our voices and command them to “be good, give in and share,” but our words seem to fall on deaf ears. Before they will comply, they need to recognize in us something that comes from deeper within. Remember your parents. Don’t you mainly remember their actions rather than their words? Because children observe everything and have a keen ability to recognize what comes from the real place of the heart, they learn best from personal examples; we are just the same.

We must take the opportunity the High Holidays provide in order to rediscover the ties of loving connection between us. We lack only the awareness of our division to be able to cry out and ask for the strength to unite, for the force of love and correction. Our ultimate goal is to internalize the notion that we are parts of one single body functioning in mutual guarantee and love.

The love that we are talking about is internal, deep, and hidden.  It does not burst out in front of everyone as it is seen in films or theatre, where it is selfish love anyway. So it is difficult and complicated to demonstrate what it is like when all are connected and feeling as one.

After we come to this profound awareness of the state we should be in and realize that we have not even come close to exerting enough efforts in that direction, then we are ready to repent and to plead for help. When together we come to such a heartfelt demand for healing and unity between us, we are ready with a prayer that will certainly be fulfilled.