SHABBOS SHUVA 1984
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Rambam's Hilchos Teshuva, the laws of Teshuva, the Rambam begins by telling us all Mitzvahs that are in the Torah. Whether they are positive or negative commandments, we must do Teshuva. The Rambam tells us how we first must recognize our sin, say we are sorry, and determine not to do it again. In the second paragraph of these laws of Teshuva the Rambam tells us about the scapegoat that used to be offered in Jerusalem. He tells us that the scapegoat would atone for all the sins in the Torah, the light ones and the hard ones, if a person did Teshuva, but if a person did not do Teshuva the scapegoat would only forgive the light sins. He then explains what are the light sins and what are the strict sins. It says any sin in which you would be liable for the death penalty or excision, "Korais," are considered hard sins, and if you did not do Teshuva you would not be forgiven. What's going on here? In the second paragraph of the laws of Teshuva the Rambam said you had to do Teshuva regardless of whether or not the sin was hard or light, positive or negative, or you would not be forgiven. Here in the second paragraph the Rambam is saying that you will be forgiven automatically for your light sins just by the scapegoat. What's more, the Rambam's definition of light sins and strict sins is different from that given any other place. In the other places the Rambam says that an easy sin is any sin in which you do not get "Malkas" or stripes, and the hard sin is any sin in which you get "Malkas" or stripes. In fact, we know that if anyone is convicted of stripes that person can no longer be a witness. What's more, it seems that the Rambam is shuttling between the opinions of Ravi and the rabbis. Ravi says that the day of Yom Kippur, itself, atones while the rabbis say only Teshuva atones. In fact, the Rambam, in the fourth paragraph, speaking about sins says that if you violate a positive commandment and do Teshuva you immediately are forgiven. If you violate a negative commandment that does not have excision and do Teshuva the Teshuva hangs until Yom Kippur and then you are forgiven. So we see that Teshuva is necessary even for negative commandments. Why, then, did the Rambam say what he did in the second paragraph about the scapegoat? Actually, here we are dealing with two different types of sin. When it comes to an individual sinning then obviously Teshuva is required. What was the scapegoat? The

scapegoat was a sacrifice of the Jewish people, the Jewish people as a corporate entity, as a unique and special entity. The Jewish people is not just the sum of all its individuals. There is such a thing as the Jewish people perse. When we sin many times we sin as part of a people and we sin also as individuals. The second paragraph was meant to deal with our sins as part of the Jewish people. In the Yom Kippur prayers we say "G-d pardons and forgives our sins and the sins of His People, the House of Israel." There are two different types of sins: sins we do as individuals and the sins we do or do not do as Jews. In fact, the next sentence "and He removes our guilt every year" shows that there are two types of sin. The word "Asham" or guilt has the same root as destruction. An individual, if he sins, can be destroyed, but the Jewish people has been promised to be eternal. When a person sins as an individual it is necessary that he do Teshuva. When an individual sins as a Jew, by not assuming his responsibilities as a Jew, by not living as a Jew, by not identifying with the Jewish people, he, too, sins. That sin can be made up by coming to Shul on Yom Kippur and participating in the services of Yom Kippur. This is what Ravi probaby meant when he said that the day of Yom Kippur, itself, atones. It atones for those sins of being a Jew, but not those sins as an individual where you harm another human being. This is why, too, the Rambam made the distinction he did between the hard sins and the light sins. If a person did not do Teshuva and he violated a sin which cuts him off from the Jewish people, like not fasting on Yom Kippur or not celebrating Passover, he cannot rejoin the Jewish people without Teshuva. He has cut himself off from the Jewish people. This applies most certainly to the death penalty. When a Jew does these things he has cut himself off from the people and, in fact, it is true that when a Jew stops celebrating these things then he or his children or his children's children will stop being Jewish. This explains, too, why the Selichos prayers are different when the congregation first says them silently and then when the Cantor repeats them. When an individual says them he puts them at the very end and there are no opening verses. We just go into the confession of sins. However, the Selichos

that the Cantor says in the middle of the Amidah has opening sentences which, in effect, not ask for forgiveness but demand it, because G-d has promised that the Jewish people will be eternal, and we know that when we turn to Him He will always forgive us. That's why, too, the tunes are happy. In the Selichos of the congregation we say "Adoshem Adoshem" because G-d told Moshe that this brings forgiveness to the Jewish people. As individuals we do not say it because we must always do Teshuva before we can be forgiven. According to the Medrash G-d donned a tallis and told Moshe to say this prayer "Adoshem Adoshem" when the people of Israel sinned but not when individuals sinned. That's why, too, the Selichos that are said in the middle of the Cantor's repetition of the Amidah have happy tunes because we know that the people of Israel will be forgiven if they but turn to G-d. On Rosh Hashonna, too, we have two separate blowings for the Shofar. We have 30 notes that are blown before the Mussaf. They are called "Meushav." There are also 30 notes that are blown during the Mussaf Amidah. They are called "Maumad." If a person was sick at home all he has to hear are the 30 blasts "Meushav" because they are for the individual. The ones that are done for Mussaf are done for the community. We then see that on Yom Kippur there are two types of forgiveness: forgiveness for what we do as part of the Jewish people; and forgiveness for what we do as individuals. Just coming to Shul and identifying with the Jewish people is enough to gain forgiveness as Jews, but as individuals we need Teshuva. However, if our sins are such that they cause us to deny our Jewishness, cause us to have "Korais," then we no longer can be forgiven just by coming to the Shul on the High Holidays. Jews must identify with their people. That's why it is to the eternal credit of the German Jews who came to this country in the 1840's and 1850's that despite the fact that they changed many things, they still helped their brethren and identified themselves as Jews. There are other groups who, although they seem very pious, because they do not identify with the Jewish land of the Jewish people, will probably in the course of time stop being considered Jews. This is, of course, what happened with the early Christians when they split with Judaism. During the great revolt from 66-70 and also 60 years later during the revolt

of Archakfa they left Jerusalem and went to Petro in Transjordan. They even became informers. They no longer were part of the Jewish people. On Yom Kippur we ask not only for forgiveness, but also to be pure. This can only come about if we cleanse ourselves of our individual sins. Community identification and being restored to a status as a good Jew will not give us this purity. We also must have individual Teshuva. May we all be granted this Teshuva, and may we all be renewed as Jews and feel pure as individuals.