## Apology Accepted Rosh Hashana Day 2, 5770 Rabbi Steven Saks

It is a beautiful day; you are sitting on your couch drinking coffee, looking out the window, when you notice your next door neighbor breaking into your car. You jump up, run out the door screaming, but as you arrive he pulls away in your car. As you are pulling your cell phone out of your pocket to call the police, he circles around the block and pulls up in front of you and says, "I'm sorry I stole your car," and then pulls out and drives away. Would you accept that apology? Of course not! If he were really sorry, he would have returned your car.

Over the High Holidays we spend a lot of time apologizing to G-d. We have an entire prayer book, the Machzor, which helps us do so, but just as importantly, how do we apologize to each other? I would like to speak about another book, which will help us to apologize to each other, The Five Languages Of Apology, by Dr. Gary Chapman and Dr. Jennifer Thomas. The premise of the book is that there are five languages of apology:

- 1. Expressing regret: "I am sorry "
- 2. Excepting responsibility: "I was wrong"
- 3. Making restitution: "How can I fix it"
- 4. Genuine repentance "I will try not to do it again"
- 5. Requesting forgiveness: "Will you forgive me?"

Different people have different languages of apology. When apologized to, some people want to hear the person apologizing say, "I was wrong," and others may want to be asked for forgiveness." Oliver North was once on the Allen Colmes show and was criticizing Jane Fonda for her actions during the Vietnam War. Colmes said to North, enough already Oliver, Fonda has already said she was sorry for her actions. North responded that saying "sorry" did not constitute an apology. For Colmes the words "I'm sorry" are his primary language of apology. In other words, when he hears somebody say they are sorry they have apologized.

Apparently saying sorry is not North's primary language of apology. Perhaps he would have liked to have had Fonda ask the American people for forgiveness or for her to make restitutions for her actions.

Let's look at the Five languages of apology:

## 1. Expressing regret: "I am Sorry."

You are sitting in a doctor's office waiting and waiting and waiting. A half hour goes by and you have read all of the magazines in the office that still refer to Obama as Senator. Another fifteen minutes goes by and you are starting to think of all the other chores that you wanted to get done, which now you will not be able to get done. You are now really getting angry and thinking about switching doctors. Finally after an hour the nurse calls you in and says that she is sorry for the wait. That may help to calm you down. The more specific the apology is, the more likely it is to calm you. For example, if the nurse said, "I am sorry you had to wait so long, I know you are busy and have other things to do, but we appreciate your patience," that will go a long way in pacifying you.

2. Excepting responsibility: "I am wrong." According to the Rambam one of the steps of *Teshuvah* repentance is confessing one's sin. Plaxico Burress, the New York Giants football star, is a great example of someone taking responsibility for his action by confessing his sin. Burress recently was arrested for illegally bringing a gun into a night club after accidentally shooting himself in the leg. The next day one of the New York papers ran a headline that read, "Giant Idiot." Burris has had a reputation for being difficult and never being able to take responsibility for his actions. But after his arrest, Burris appears to have turned a new leaf. He said that he realized what he did was wrong, that he had nobody else to blame for his error and will now have to suffer the consequence of going to prison.

3. Make restitution: "What can I do to fix it?" Another part of repentance according to the Rambam is making restitution. A girl named Paula was very close to her grandparents. One night when they were out she took their car without their permission and got into an accident. She figured that she would simply say that she was sorry to her grandparents and all will be forgiven. However, her grandparents did not except her apology, rather they said that she would have to earn their forgiveness by repaying for the damage done to their car. Paula was shocked but determined to earn forgiveness. She got a part time job and started to repay her grandparents. After repaying half the money, her grandparents told her she did not have to pay back anymore of the money because she has now proven she was a person of integrity willing to make restitution. Paula hugged her grandparents and thanked them for making her pay back some of the money, because she learned that apologizing also includes making restitution. Paula grandparents' primary language of apology was making restitution. When apologizing you can simply ask, "Is there anything I can do to make it up to you?"

## 4. Genuinely repenting: "Iwill try not to do it again."

According to the Rambam one who achieves *Teshuvah Gemura* repents completely when he is faced with the same situation in which he sinned in the past but refrains from making the same mistake again. Mark and Jen had been dating for awhile. One night they were to meet for dinner at 8:00 pm. Mark did not show up until 8:30 pm and Jen was annoyed, but, decided to go out with him again because the next day he sent flowers to her with a note saying, "I am sorry I was late." A week later they were to meet again for dinner and again Mark was a half hour late. He started to apologize, but Jen interrupted him saying, "If you are really sorry, don't apologize, don't send flowers. Just don't be late again." When apologizing, it is important to let the person know

that you will try not to make the same mistake again even though there is no guarantee that you will be able to remedy the problem immediately. Sometimes it takes multiple attempts. An example of a statement of repentance is such, "I let you down by making the same mistake again. What would it take for you to begin to rebuild your trust in me?"

5. Requesting forgiveness, "Will you please forgive me?" Often we avoid asking for forgiveness because we put ourselves in a position where the other person has the power to reject us. Martin and Angie had been married for a short period of time when Angie discovered that Martin was cheating on her. They went to counseling and began to repair their relationship. However, Martin had not yet asked for Angie's forgiveness. Angie told Martin that in order for her to put the incident behind her she needed Martin to ask for her forgiveness. Martin responded by saying that he already said he was sorry and did not see why it was necessary to ask for forgiveness. Evidently, being asked for forgiveness is Angie's primary language of apology and in order to allow Angie to forgive Martin he would have to ask for her forgiveness. What could Martin say? "You have every right never to speak to me again, but I am truly sorry for what I did. I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me."

Those are the five languages of apology that will help you to apologize to other people. Yet, there is one more person I would like you to be able to apologize to and that person is you. Dr. Chapman was counseling a high school student name Jordan who was generally upbeat. One day Jordan came to Dr. Chapman and said that he wished he was dead because he had just found out that a girl he impregnated had aborted the fetus. Jordan was stuck in a deep depression and having trouble functioning. Dr. Chapman taught Jordan the Five languages of apology and Jordan apologized to the girl, his parents, her parents, and

everyone else he thought he needed to. Yet, Jordan was still depressed. Finally, Dr. Chapman had Jordan write a letter of apology to himself which he read in the mirror. Jordan wrote. "Jordan, I want to tell you that what I did was grossly wrong. I want to tell you how bad I feel and how much I regret my actions. I want to tell you that I have learned my lesson and will abstain from sex until marriage. I want to give myself the freedom to be happy again. And Jordan, I want to ask you for your forgiveness and to help me make the most of my life in the future." As tears ran down Jordan's face he concluded, "Jordan, because your apology is sincere, I choose to forgive you."

My friends, we still have nine days until Yom Kippur. Before the gates of repentance are sealed I want you to identify one person to whom you owe an apology and apologize to him or her. After apologizing, let the guilt go. That is the power of *teshuvah*/ apology; it lets us leave our mistakes in the past, where they belong, so we can move forward.