

### A. The Teshuva/Elul Myth

Tales are told of tzadikim who, upon simply hearing the word “Elul” during the Shabbos Mevorchim prayers at the end of Av, would begin to faint. These stories were probably passed down with the hope of giving us perspective on how powerful the days of Elul could and should be, and to depict the ideal attitude toward the Days of Awe. Unfortunately, the downside of sharing such stories is the creation of a misperception that the days of Elul are days of *fear*, not awe. Early texts describing teshuva by referencing “*charata*” (guilt) and “*busha*” (embarrassment) further reinforce the notion that teshuva is either anxiety-provoking, or simply depressing.

However, a closer look at some of the

*the work of our hands our gods" (Hos.  
14.3-4). It is, moreover, essential that  
his confession shall be by spoken words of  
his lips, and all that which he concluded*

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his shame prevents him from even expressing his primary issue until we have met three or four times.

He finally acknowledges that he is behaving in a way contrary to how he wants to live; he desperately wants to stop his behavior and move in another direction. He has attempted to change multiple times but has not yet been successful. Yaakov is aware that he is doing something that he wants to discontinue and although he is trying, he has not yet succeeded. The healthy awareness of knowing and working on what he wants to change, even if not yet successful, falls under the category of constructive guilt. As soon as Yaakov pivots and views himself as a "failure" for struggling to make those important changes in his life, Yaakov enters into the domain of destructive guilt. He attacks himself for being unable to succeed at overcoming his desires, and becomes frustrated and angry at himself, identifying with his failures. He becomes less focused on his original goals and behaviors and concentrates more on his inability and failure to change. He begins to feel hopeless about the future, his ability to move forward and behave consistently with what he believes is appropriate. At this point, in addition to his original struggle with changing his target behavior, Yaakov now faces

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