



קוּמְרָם

ב'יָם דַּרְכֵךְ

B'YAM DARKECHA

Teshuva

Returning to Hashem

בס"ד



קונטרס

ב'י'ם ד'ר'כ'ך

B'YAM DARKECHA



דרכי עבודה למעשה

TESHUVA

RETURNING TO HASHEM

Published B'siyatta Dishmaya
by Machon B'yam Darkecha
in partnership with
Machon Hodu Lashem



לעילוי נשמת

בלה נחמה בת יצחק מאיר ע"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.



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פנימיות התורה והעבודה.

מאחלים

מכון בים דרכך

INTRODUCTION



When we are inspired to do Teshuva, it is very common for us to make commitments in areas we will improve in. But all too often, over time, those resolutions seem to fade away – sometimes to the extent that we do not even remember what we committed to do!

Even if we do remember what the commitment was, sometimes we may feel like we need to make the same exact commitment over and over again, and it seems like we are not making any progress whatsoever.

These kinds of thoughts about Teshuva weaken a person's resolve, and eventually we may give up entirely, feeling in the depths of our heart that we will never truly merit a complete and lasting Teshuva.

But such despair is born from having an incorrect understanding of what Teshuva is.

It is true that the practical components of Teshuva are: 1) *Charata* – regret for having sinned 2) *Vidui* – confession (articulating the sins committed) and 3) *Kabbalah al ha'asid* – committing not to do the sin again. Nevertheless, it is crucial to understand the core essence of what Teshuva really is.

Teshuva means to return to living with Hashem.

RETURNING TO HASHEM



When the Torah teaches about Teshuva, it says “*V'shavta ad Hashem Elokecha, you shall return to Hashem your God.*”¹ When a Yid does an *aveirah* (sin), he distances himself from Hashem. When a Yid does Teshuva, he is returning to Hashem to live a life of connection and closeness with Him. As the Rambam writes “*When he sinned, he was distant, and when he returns he becomes beloved.*”

This is the *pnimiyus*, the core essence, of what Teshuva is. When a person turns his back on Hashem, and acts and feels in a way that is distant from Hashem, then Hashem reflects that sense of distance² from him. But the moment a Yid decides to return to Hashem, he is immediately received with love!

Therefore, doing Teshuva is so, so, simple! All you need to do is come before Hashem and say “*Hashem, I made a mistake! I followed the lies and deception of my Yetzer Hara, but now I see that it was worthless and brought me nothing but bitterness. Hashem, I regret what I have done and I am coming back to You. From now on I am with You, and I will follow Your ways.*”

1. Devarim 30:2.

2. We will soon see that even this ‘sense of distance’ is only the way we experience it, but the reality is that Hashem never leaves our side (see footnote 3).

This is the moment Hashem has been waiting for.³ The moment He hears this, He immediately accepts our Teshuva, erases the past, and we start a crisp, clean, new page in our service of Hashem, a connection of joy and passion.

This is the core essence of Teshuva, returning to live a life of closeness to Hashem.

We still have some work to do. We will need to correct our old mistakes because even if we have returned to live with

3. Hashem is our merciful Father, and he loves every single Jew like a father loves his child. When a father is disappointed in his son's behavior, he hopes for the day when he will improve, but he never stops loving his child! Just as a father will always love his child, Hashem, our Father in Heaven, loves every single one of us at all times, no matter what! Every Yid is cherished by Hashem and shown compassion not only as a child, but as an only child.

Therefore, even if we have sinned, Hashem loves us very much. All we need to do is decide to get back up again after we have fallen, wipe off the dirt, and run back into Hashem's outstretched arms. This is precisely why Hashem gave us the great gift of Teshuva, so we have a way to clean ourselves of our past mistakes.

The Yetzer Hara does not want us to know this. He tries to convince us that Hashem is angry at us for our actions and does not want a relationship with us anymore. But this is just yet another deception of the Yetzer Hara.

The truth is that Hashem loves us deeply, even if we have a spiritual fall. When we sin, we distance ourselves from Hashem, which prompts Him to act towards us in accordance with the distance that we have created. But Hashem never actually went anywhere! He was just waiting for us to decide to return back to Him. The moment we do so, He begins to reflect that warm closeness back towards us.

Hashem, if we have some dirt on ourselves, we need to clean that off.

We also need to improve our future behaviors because if we have truly returned to live with Hashem, and are determined to please our Father in Heaven, we certainly need to be very careful to avoid rebelling against the way He instructs us to live.

RETURNING WITH JOY



Therefore, Teshuva should be done with true *simcha* (joy).⁴ Teshuva means to return to our Father in Heaven. What greater joy is there than an estranged child coming back to their father's home, being received by their father's outstretched arms?⁵

Yes, the child will need to ask their father's forgiveness and make sure to behave properly from now on. But there is no

4. There are growth-minded Jews who take their Judaism seriously but fall into a state of sadness when they sin, and their whole process of Teshuva is done with a sense of heaviness and difficulty. In this state, they are unable to return to Hashem because their perspective towards Teshuva stems from a mistaken understanding of what Teshuva really is.

5. As it says "כי ימינך פשוטה לקבל שבים", *Your right arm is outstretched to receive those who return.*"

doubt that the dominant feeling in such a reunion will be pure joy!

Again, Teshuva is when a Yid makes the decision that “from now on I am with Hashem,” and regrets ever leaving Him and acting against His will. The moment he does this, he is welcomed back into the palace of the King by his dear Father in Heaven, Who has always loved him and Who has been waiting with anticipation for him to come home.⁶

Teshuva means to return to Hashem with a sense of inner joy. How privileged we are to have a Father in Heaven Who never gave up on us, Who has been waiting for us eagerly even when we have strayed, and Who embraces us with love the moment we decide to come home. How special it is to be the beloved children and nation of Hashem!

What incredible joy should fill the heart of a Yid who has come home! The natural outcome of such a happy reunion should be a renewed excitement and passion in Torah and Mitzvos. Hashem has welcomed us back with love. And the truth is, He never left.

6. As we say in davening on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur about one who sins “ועד יום מותו תחכה לו אם ישוב מיד תקבלו” - Until the day he dies, You wait for him, if he will return You immediately accept him.”

ACHIEVABLE COMMITMENTS



The practical steps of Teshuva are pleasant and simple, and can be done properly by anyone, each person on their own level. Hashem does not ask us to do things that are impossible for us. He does not ask us to be angels.

Hashem wants us to return to Him with all our heart; to decide that “from now on, I will live a life of closeness with Hashem.”

Hashem wants us to live the right way; to bring Him into the picture, to understand and remember that He, and only He, is the source of all good and the Giver of life, and there is nothing to be found outside of His existence.

Although we must act in a way that is desired in the eyes of Hashem, the truth is that this is not overly difficult. Hashem asks us to exert ourselves, each person on their own level, based on their own situation and environment, to live life in accordance with His will, as He instructed us to do in the Torah.

Hashem does not demand perfection from us, but rather that we make a real effort to see Him and come close to Him. If we can do this, even though we have not perfected all of our actions, our Teshuva is complete.

There is no such thing as perfection for human beings. Hashem, Who probes our heart and knows our innermost

feelings and intentions,⁷ when He sees us do as much as we can, in accordance with our unique circumstance, He forgives us⁸ and draws us closer.

7. Some people are hesitant to talk about how easy it is to do Teshuva because they are concerned that if people would know, then their Teshuva would not be sincere, and they may fall into a situation of “Echta v'ashuv,” sinning with the intention of doing Teshuva afterwards, about whom it is written (Yumah 8:9) “אין מספיקין בידו לעשות תשובה” he will be unable to do Teshuva.”

But this would not be a reason to hide how easy it is to do Teshuva. Since this is the way Hashem created Teshuva, we do not have to hide anything due to a concern that people will misuse the power of Teshuva. Some people will use Teshuva properly, and some people will not. As it is written, “כי ישרים דרכי ד' וצדיקים ילכו בהם ופושעים יכשלו בהם,” The ways of Hashem are upright, the righteous will follow them and the wicked will stumble on them.”

We also do not need to withhold the truth about Teshuva because we are worried that someone will then do it insincerely due to the fact that it is so easy. The One Who accepts Teshuva and grants us forgiveness is Hashem, Who probes our heart and knows our innermost feelings and intentions. It is therefore impossible to do an insincere Teshuva.

8. You may ask: Does this mean that Hashem is just giving us a free pass on our sins? Is there not judgement and accountability for every action that a person does in his life? The answer is that judgment is for aveiros (sins), but when a person does a proper Teshuva, Hashem forgives him for those actions and wipes his slate clean. Such a person simply does not have any more aveiros!

As a comparison, if a son rebels against his father, the father will be most distressed by the very fact that his son is rebelling against him, more than his distress over the particular actions the son does to express that

Over time, with Hashem's help, we will correct and improve our actions more and more, but our Teshuva is complete and accepted now, even before that progress is actualized.

REGRET



Sincere regret and sorrow over the aveiros we have done is a necessary component of Teshuva, but it is not the core essence of what Teshuva is. Rather, part of the way we express our return to Hashem in actionable steps is that, at a specific time, as we are doing Teshuva, we need to feel and express a bit of regret and sorrow over the aveiros that we have done.

In the example of the son returning to his father, when he asks his father for forgiveness for what he has done, certainly he needs to express that with sincere regret and pain.

rebelliousness.

Therefore, when the son returns to his father, the most important thing for the father is that the son has stopped rebelling and has returned to him with love. Once that happens, the father can overlook punishing the son for the particular bad actions he did.

At that point, even if it takes a bit of time for the son to shake off his bad habits and get accustomed to living in his father's house, the father tolerates that, because the main thing is that he came home.

This demonstrates that we truly acknowledge our mistakes and are sincere about our return. This is done for a limited amount of time as part of the process of Teshuva, amongst the backdrop of the incredible joy of returning to Hashem, of turning a new page and starting to live a life of closeness and attachment to Hashem!

There is nothing sweeter, nothing that brings more happiness, than a neshama that is returning to attach itself to its Lifesource.

TEARS



Tears are a reflection of our innermost feelings, and if we can shed a tear of regret, it will demonstrate our sincerity even more, showing Hashem how truly pained we are by what has been.

Even tears of regret, however, can be an outpouring of the inner joy of returning to Hashem. It is the very joy of recognizing the goodness of the King and making the decision to return to Him that is bringing him these strong emotions.

When that child, who has been away from his father for a long time runs into his father's outstretched arms, you can be sure he will shed tears of regret that he wandered and left his father's palace in the first place. But even those tears will be driven by the joy he has at returning home, to his father's loving embrace.

NO PLACE FOR SADNESS



Sadness (*Atzvus*) is the epitome of the work of the *klippas*,⁹ (evil entities) and therefore it is impossible to suggest that it is a component of Teshuva. **There is no place for sadness in the process of Teshuva!**

The Yetzer Hara is always trying to introduce a sense of sadness or heaviness into a Yid's service of Hashem. His hopes are not only that this will make it less likely for the Yid to successfully complete the mitzvah, but also that the next time he has the same mitzvah opportunity, he would be less interested in it because he has a bad association with it. Others will see him lose his interest, and this will cool off their passion for the mitzvah as well.

Proper Teshuva means to return to the King's palace, to enter His inner chamber and have a deep and personal relationship with the Creator of the world. Teshuva should come with a sense of light, excitement, and deep inner satisfaction. What could possibly be better than being close to our Father in Heaven, the King of the world!¹⁰

9. עצבות היא קליפה ממש.

10. When a person approaches Teshuva in this way, understanding that the goal of Teshuva is to return to live with Hashem with our heart and soul, then the commitments he makes to improve his ways will be built on a strong foundation. Such commitments are a natural expression of

FORGET THE PAST



The Yetzer Hara does not give up the fight when he sees us doing Teshuva. He tries to get us to hold onto the past. *"You have been here before! Let's see how long this Teshuva lasts! How can you cling to Hashem, you are not worthy of high levels of spirituality and attachment to Hashem after what you've done!"*

The truth is that the Yetzer Hara tries to do this all the time, even when we are not trying to do Teshuva. No matter where we are holding in our *avodas Hashem* (service of Hashem), there is always room for improvement. Nobody is perfect,

his yearning to come closer and closer to Hashem. Commitments that are made in this way are likely to be successful (see footnote 12).

This is what Hashem wants from us. He wants our heart, He wants us to love Him and yearn for closeness with Him, and He wants us to express that closeness through action (Torah and mitzvos).

Therefore, when we do Teshuva, the first commitments should be in areas that will bring us a sense of closeness and attachment to Hashem. This will help strengthen the foundation of our *avodas Hashem*, and keep us focused on our goal of living a life of closeness to Hashem.

This is the pathway to real growth in service of Hashem and a full and complete Teshuva. When our goal is to come close to Hashem and live with Him in every area of our lives, and then we make measured, incremental commitments that express that desire, step by step we will grow closer to Him and make true and lasting progress in the areas we need to improve in.

and there is no such thing as achieving absolute perfection in any area.

The Yetzer Hara constantly tries to use our imperfections against us, convincing us that we are not worthy, and we are not being fully successful anyway, so what is the point of continuing to try. His goal is to get us to despair entirely, or at the very least to cool off our enthusiasm for growth.

Therefore, a fundamental component of our *avodas Hashem* is that we must not dwell on the past. We must focus only on the fresh start that stands before us.

The Yetzer Hara tries to prevent us from turning over a new leaf by holding us back because of our previous mistakes. We need to respond by telling him that yesterday's mistakes do not, in any way, prevent us from today's mission. As it says in the Torah "*Asher Anochi mitzavecha hayom*. "*As I have commanded you today*." Every day is a new mission, a new opportunity, and a fresh start.

No matter what happened in the past, the Torah wants us to view the moment that stands before us - *hayom* - as if this is our very first day of serving Hashem, without paying any attention to what happened prior to it.

This is how we can achieve an exciting renewal in our *avodas Hashem*, while rejecting the despair that the Yetzer Hara tries to give us.

BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF TESHUVA



But how can we just forget about everything we have done and start again with a clean slate?

The answer is that this is precisely the reason Hashem gave us the powerful mitzvah of Teshuva. A Yid that does Teshuva is immediately cleansed of his aveiros and forgiven for his actions. It is the mitzvah of Teshuva that empowers us to begin a fresh start, to a new beginning full of hope and opportunity.

Hashem, with His endless love and compassion for us, gave us the powerful tool of Teshuva. We must truly believe that when a Yid returns to Hashem, sincerely regretting what he has done and committing to live a true life of closeness to Hashem, that Hashem cleanses and purifies his soul entirely from every stain or blemish.

Teshuva purifies us as if we had never sinned in our life. **Even if a Yid, God forbid, violated every single prohibition in the Torah, through Teshuva he can become a Tzadik Yesoid Olam, a holy and righteous Tzadik, by starting fresh from the moment of Teshuva.**

Not only that, but in some ways one who sinned and does Teshuva is considered to be on an even higher level than someone who had not sinned at all.¹¹

CONTINUOUS TESHUVA



Nobody is perfect. Each person, on their own level and within their own growth patterns has what to fix and areas to improve in. We all have ups and downs, and every time we fall we may find ourselves doing teshuva for what seems like the same exact aveirah again. This means that as we grow we will find ourselves constantly needing to do Teshuva, starting a brand new page in any particular area again and again.

This can lead us to become disheartened with Teshuva. *I have already returned to Hashem! Why do I find myself constantly returning again and again?!* We can begin to lose our faith in our ability to do Teshuva, thinking that this is a sign that our Teshuva was not proper or authentic.

But this thought process comes from mistakenly thinking that the purpose of Teshuva is to transform us into perfect people who act exactly as we should in every area.

11. As it says (Brachos 34b) “צדיקים עומדים אין צדיקים גמורים” “יכולים לעמוד בו”, The place where the repentant stands, the fully righteous cannot stand.

The truth is that the essence of Teshuva is to return to live a life of attachment to Hashem, a life of *emunah* and recognition of His absolute Oneness. Hashem is Infinite and there are endless spiritual levels in how deeply we can achieve this.

Therefore, each time we do Teshuva, it is not as if we took a step down (by sinning), then up (by doing Teshuva), and now we are right back to where we had started! Each time we do Teshuva, we elevate ourselves a bit higher, we come closer to Hashem a little deeper than last time.

It is true that our actions are not instantly perfected with Teshuva.¹² Nevertheless, the essence of Teshuva is to return

12. Certainly we must be constantly improving our actions and behaviors more and more, over time. A crucial component of Teshuva is to make every effort to refine our behavior to be aligned with what Hashem wants from us – each individual person based on their unique circumstances and spiritual level.

Nevertheless, that is not the main point of Teshuva. The core essence of Teshuva is to return to Hashem, to live a life of recognizing His presence and Oneness, and to decide to attach and commit yourself to Him.

While it is a necessary part of Teshuva to make good concrete commitments to improve our behaviors, such commitments should be made in a measured and mindful way, fueled by the joy of coming back to Hashem.

Even though it takes some time to incrementally improve our actions, returning to live with Hashem is something we achieve immediately and completely the moment we decide to return to live with Hashem!

The indicator over whether someone was successful in doing a proper Teshuva is if he feels happy when he does it. A person who returns to live



our hearts to Hashem, and every time we do so we truly attain a higher level of connection to Hashem, and we are not simply repeating a pattern that gets us nowhere.

with Hashem will feel the pleasure of closeness to Hashem, the serenity and security of placing himself in Hashem's hands like a baby in its mother's arms. This will lead him to improve his actions with a full heart and in an effective way.

A child who was lost, found its way home, and ran into its parents outstretched arms will be feeling pure joy.

On the other hand, someone who takes on huge commitments and tries to become perfectly righteous in one day, is demonstrating that he thinks Teshuva is only about correcting our actions, and not about coming back to live with Hashem. He is also demonstrating that he thinks it is in man's hands alone to perfect his behavior. This is incorrect, as our sages teach us (Sukkah 52b) "A person's evil inclination overpowers him every day...and if not for the Holy One, blessed is His name, Who assists him, he would not be able to overcome it."

Such a 'Teshuva' will definitely not be successful, because this is not authentic Teshuva.

Rather, improving our behavior must be done in steps that are within our reach based on our individual level, and come hand in hand with the understanding that the point of Teshuva is to return to living with closeness and attachment to Hashem.

Someone who has not internalized this, and tries to take on commitments that are not appropriate for him on his level, will not be successful in his commitments. This is Divinely orchestrated because Hashem wants him to rethink his approach, to search for the correct path of Teshuva and to find it. Hashem wants him to experience closeness and attachment to Him in all areas of life and in all of his actions.



Every Teshuva done with a heartfelt desire to come back to Hashem brings us to a higher level than we were before. Even though we cannot perfect our actions instantly, such a Teshuva is authentic and sincere.

Glossary of Hebrew Terms

Only terms that are not immediately translated in the book are listed here.

Aveirah (pl. Aveiros): Sin(s)

Avodas Hashem: Service of Hashem

B'yam Darkecha: (Lit. *In the Sea of Your Way*) — the name of this book in the original Hebrew

Hashem: God ("He, Him, Who, Father, King, Giver, One, Oneness, Lifesource, Creator" when capitalized mid-sentence are also references to God)

Mitzvah (pl. Mitzvos): Commandment(s)

Neshama: Jewish soul

Rambam: Maimonides

Teshuva: Returning to Hashem, (sometimes poorly translated as "Repentance")

Torah: Bible

Yetzer Hara: Evil inclination

Yid (pl. Yidden): Jew(s)



לעילוי נשמת

יוסף משה בן פינחס הלוי ז"ל
שמואל בנימין בן פינחס הלוי ז"ל

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

