



INNER TESHUVAH

PARSHAS VAYEILECH

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*Inner Teshuvah*¹

Teshuvah - Returning

We are in the Ten Days of Repentance, which ends on the holy day of Yom Kippur, the “day that atones for those who return”².

The *Rishonim* explain that “*teshuvah*” (repentance) means to “return” to the situation of before the sin. This applies both on a personal level, as well as on the collective level of mankind, for all of mankind must ultimately repent over the source of all sin, the sin of Adam HaRishon.

But to explain this more, the Gemara³ says that a *baal teshuvah* is one who is tempted three times in the exact same situation to commit the old sin, and he overcomes the test each time. So *teshuvah* is when the situation returns to you again, and you choose not to sin; that is how one “returns” to the situation of before the sin.

Rabbeinu Yonah, in *Shaarei Teshuvah*, adds on to this that even if the person is never actually tested with the temptation again, but he has elevated himself to a level in which it is clear to Hashem that this person would not sin again in this situation, it is considered that he has overcome the sin and that he has genuinely done *teshuvah* over the sin.

In any case, *teshuvah* is defined as returning to how it was before the situation of the sin. On a more subtle note, it is a return to the exact same temptation and to overcome the temptation, which returns him to the level of before the sin.

From a simple understanding, *teshuvah* is when a person committed a certain act of sin and he repents over this action that he committed. He returns himself to what it was like before the sinful action. But there is more depth to it, for man consists of both external and internal layers, which go beyond action; Rabbeinu Yonah says that part of *teshuvah* is to fix the desire to sin - he must not only rectify the deed he committed, but the root of the sin, which was the very desire to sin.

Thus, *teshuvah* is not just about correcting the “action” that was committed by the physical body. It is about returning the soul’s abilities to their proper place, which had been misused for the purpose of sinning, and thus they need to be returned to their pure source.

If one only does *teshuvah* on a “body” level, his *teshuvah* begins and ends with deeds; he committed a sinful ‘act’ and later he repents over the sinful ‘act’. He stops sinning when he is tested again, by refraining from the committing the deed again. But one who cares for his soul will be more

¹ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/yom-kippur-025-inner-teshuvah>

² On another note, the Rav explained that there is also an aspect of Yom Kippur which atones even for those who do not return. Refer to the *shiur* of בהגפיש_007 יום כיפור

³ Yoma 86a

concerned that just rectifying the actions. Besides for doing *teshuvah* in the physical sense, by refraining from actions of sin, he will do more *teshuvah* than that. He does *teshuvah* in his very soul.

Inner Teshuvah

What is *teshuvah* on a soul level?

There are many facets to this. The Maharal⁴ wrote a section entitled *Nesiv HaTeshuvah*, which consists of eight chapters, and in the beginning chapters, the Maharal writes of four steps of what it means to do “inner *teshuvah*”.

Anyone who cares for his soul needs to first conceptualize these matters at least intellectually, and then he must attempt to recognize these matters on a personal level and do *teshuvah* accordingly.

Teshuvah on a physical body level, as we explained, is to refrain from committing the sinful action. This includes recognizing that the action is a sin; to regret it and to confess it verbally, and to resolve not to commit the sin again. These are the four parts of repentance which we are all familiar with⁵, because they are all within the realm of action, and we live in a “world of action”, so we can identify better with these aspects. It is clear to us what sin is and it is clear to us what *teshuvah* is; of course, there is difficulty in doing *teshuvah*, but at least we recognize what *teshuvah* is, when it comes to the realm of “action”.

One who cares for his soul not only does *teshuvah* on a physical level by refraining from sinful actions; he does *teshuvah* on an inner level. Inner *teshuvah* requires firstly a conceptual understanding of what defines *teshuvah*, and after that, for one to recognize these matters personally in his own soul, and to do *teshuvah* from that inner level of recognition.

1- Returning To Higher Intellect

The first facet of inner *teshuvah*, the Maharal writes, is to return to the higher intellect that is far removed from any materialistic aspects of man (“*seichel nivdal*”, or “*seichel elyon*”).

Sin comes from a pull towards materialism, which lowers man from the higher intellect that is apart from materialism. This intellect, the Maharal says, is essentially referring to the holy Torah.

It is clear that the fact that the Torah was given on Yom Kippur [the second set of Luchos] is not a coincidence; there is a connection between Torah and Yom Kippur. It is because Torah is the root of *teshuvah*. The inner work of our soul is to return the materialistic drives of the body that caused one to sin, to the higher intellect that is the Torah.

⁴ *Nesivas Olam: Nesiv HaTeshuvah*

⁵ The four basic steps in *teshuvah* are: (1) *azivas hacheit*, abandoning the sin; (2) *charatah*, regret; (3) *viduy*, confession; (4) *kabbalah al ha'asid* – resolving not to commit this sin again.

We can all identify with refraining from committing the action of sin again, but to return afterwards to the higher intellect is a concept that we are not always familiar with. We are not referring to regular human intellect, but to a higher intellect contained in the soul. It is for one to truthfully return, in his very soul, to the Torah. This is the *avodah* of doing *teshuvah* in our soul.

If one is not clear that the body and the soul are separate entities, he will be like a mixture that is not sorted out, and it will then not be possible for him to do *teshuvah* on the inner level. But if a person is aware of his inner workings, knowing the difference between his materialistic drives of the body (*nefesh habehaimis* (animalistic layer of the soul) with the higher aspects of his inner self – the higher intellect, contained in the *neshamah* (Divine soul) – he will be able to do *teshuvah* on Yom Kippur on an entirely deeper level. Besides for the five forms of suffering of the body on Yom Kippur, he will be returning to the Torah on Yom Kippur.

This is the hidden “giving of the Torah” that is contained in Yom Kippur. It is a concept that most people do not know about, not even intellectually. There is almost no one who thinks about the giving of the Torah that is on Yom Kippur. As we have explained here according to the Maharal, it is part of the fundamental understanding of deeper *teshuvah*.

2- Returning To The State of “Yashrus”

A second aspect of inner *teshuvah*, the Maharal explains, is to return to the state of “*yoshor*” (uprightness) which existed before the first sin.

It is written, “G-d made man upright (*yoshor*), but they sought many calculations (*cheshbonos rabim*)”. By sinning, man deviated from the truth, and ever since then, man has fallen into the state of “*cheshbonos rabim*”. By sinning, man deviated from the truth, from *yashrus* (straight-mindedness), and he fell into *cheshbonos rabim* which are crooked and deviating from truth.

Thus, *teshuvah* on a deeper level means to return from our crooked state of post-sin and to return the original state - *yoshor*, or *yashrus*, or *seichel hayoshor*.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner writes that *yashrus* of *seichel* defines the praise of our earlier *Rishonim*, who possessed *sevara yeshara* (straight, pure logic) and *yashrus halev* (uprightness of heart). Of *yashrus halev*, it is written, “*U’liyishrei lev simcha*” – “And to the upright of heart, there is joy.” When one reaches *yashrus lev* on Yom Kippur through his *teshuvah*, he can arrive at the true *simcha* (joy) that is on Sukkos, the time of our joy.

Thus, there is an *avodah* for one to realize how he tends to diverge from truth; both the intellect and the heart can deviate from truth, and one must see how both his intellect and heart have a tendency to deviate. Then one must attempt to return himself to the original state of *yashrus* that is deep within.

One must first understand this at least on a conceptual level, and after understanding it intellectually, one must then work on this matter personally, returning his own soul from the state of

crookedness, back to the man's original state of *yashrus*. "G-d made man upright" – this is where we must return to when we do *teshuvah*.

3- Returning To "Peshitus"

The third aspect of inner *teshuvah*, the Maharal writes, is to return to *peshitus*, "simplicity". Sin, by contrast, comes from *harkavah* (combining factors together), and when one combines various thoughts together, sometimes he acts correctly because of this, and sometimes he comes to act incorrectly. But the pure state of the soul is *peshitus* (simplicity), where it is not possible to think of sinning.

Thus, one who cares for his soul needs to return to this simple point ("*makom hapashut*") in the soul. The depth of repenting over a sin – returning from it – is to return to *peshitus*. If one does not recognize a place of *peshitus* in his own soul, he is like a "captured child" who doesn't know any better, who lives in ignorance of this place in the soul; he has nowhere to return to from sin. But when one recognizes in his soul the areas of *harkavah* and *peshitus*, he can then understand the concept of the Maharal that *teshuvah* is about returning to *peshitus*.

4 – Returning To Our Beginning Point

A fourth part of inner *teshuvah*, the Maharal says, is to return to our very beginning point ("*nekudah raishis*").

When one does *teshuvah* only a partial level, he has not yet returned to his beginning. But we ask Hashem that we be returned to Him in "*teshuvah shelaimah*", in "complete *teshuvah*", as we daven in Shemoneh Esrei: החזירנו בתשובה שלימה לפניך "Return us, in complete repentance, before You." What is "complete *teshuvah*"? It means to return to the very beginning point.

This is the depth of the *avodah* of doing *teshuvah*. If one returns himself to the beginning point, he will surely arrive at Torah and Hashem. If he doesn't return to Torah and to Hashem after doing *teshuvah*, he was missing complete *teshuvah*.

These four parts of doing *teshuvah* define the *avodah* of *teshuvah* for one who cares about his soul. It is about where we are supposed trying to return ourselves to.

If someone is only concerned with returning from sinful actions and to stop committing the actions of sin, this is wonderful, but to remain at that level is a *teshuvah* on the level of the physical body alone; he remains in *katnus mochin* (small-mindedness).

One who cares for his soul is concerned with returning to the higher intellect of the soul, which is the holy Torah, given on Yom Kippur; he is concerned with returning himself to *yashrus*, to the most complete level of *teshuvah*. He is not satisfied with the partial level of *teshuvah*; he seeks these

four levels of *teshuvah*, climbing higher and higher through these levels, until he reaches the highest level of *teshuvah*, where he returns to his beginning point.

In Summary

Doing *teshuvah* on a deep level requires one to first return himself to the higher intellect of Torah, then to *yashrus*, then to *peshitus*, and then to the beginning point. This is the meaning of “Return, Yisrael, to Hashem your G-d.”

Thus, the deeper part of our *avodah* in doing *teshuvah* is to return to these four places in the soul described: to recognize that we have fallen from these lofty places in our soul, and to then bring ourselves back.

All of this is based on the words of the Maharal.

Returning The Soul

Now that we have explained where one must “return” to in doing *teshuvah* – returning his body and soul – now let us reflect about the very concept of *teshuvah*, to “return”. We have explained to *where* we must return to; now let us think about *what it means to return*.

It is clear how we can return our body; we can go from place to place and return our body to where it was. But how do we use our soul’s power to “return”?

If one has never yet wondered about this, he is attempting to do *teshuvah* with a power that he has never yet recognized. He will be able to do *teshuvah* on the physical level, such as by refraining from sin, but he will not be able to go beyond that level. *Teshuvah* involves regret and resolving not to sin again. These are powers of our soul, so we need to know how to use our soul’s power to return, in order to really do *teshuvah*.

The Inherent Force of “Teshuvah” Throughout All of Creation

What is the soul’s power to return? *Teshuvah* is an all-compassing power that applies to all of Creation, for all of Creation needs to return to its Source.

The Jewish people are commanded with a *mitzvah* to do *teshuvah*. Gentiles do not have *mitzvah* to do *teshuvah*, but they are capable of doing *teshuvah*; Adam, Kayin, and Noach all did *teshuvah*, and all the gentile nations who come from them inherited as well the power to do *teshuvah*.

But can an animal do *teshuvah*? Can a plant or an inanimate object do *teshuvah*? It seems that there is no concept of *teshuvah* by them. Can an animal sin? Does it commit a sin if it cohabits with a human? Can a plant commit a sin? Can a rock or any other inanimate object commit a sin?

Obviously, there is no concept of sin when it comes to animals, plants, and inanimate objects. So what does it mean that there is a concept of *teshuvah* that applies to all the different kinds of creations?

However, this is not a question, when we truly understand the concept behind *teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* is a power of the soul, and all creations have souls, so every creation has a power to return, regardless of whether it sins or not. Of course, the main concept of *teshuvah* is to repent over sins. But there is an inherent ability in all of creation to do *teshuvah* – the power to “return” to a source.

With the Jewish people, it is a commandment to do *teshuvah*, and with gentiles, who are not commanded to do *teshuvah*, they can still do *teshuvah*. An animal can also do *teshuvah* – it can “return”; the Gemara says that birds yearn to return to their original nest, because they want to see where they came from. A dog laps up its saliva; it keeps coming back and returning to it. This also stems from the nature of *teshuvah* returning that all creations contain.

Even inanimate objects do *teshuvah*. The Maharal and the Vilna Gaon write that fire is naturally rising higher, because it yearns to return to its source, which is in Heaven. Fire is an inanimate object, yet it has a yearning to return to its source.

All of creation has this nature to return to its source. When we only have a superficial perspective towards *teshuvah*, we cannot fathom why there is a concept of *teshuvah* with animals, plants, and inanimate objects. But when we realize what *teshuvah* is from an inner perspective, we know that *teshuvah* is about returning to its source and how all of Creation seeks to return.

Thus, repenting over sins is only the external aspect of *teshuvah* is to repent over sin. From this perspective alone, one sinned and *teshuvah* seems like some novel concept that he must come up with. The inner aspect of *teshuvah*, though, is not to come up with anything novel. It is a power inherent in all of Creation, so it is nothing new.

Even more so, the Sages state that *teshuvah* is one of the seven things that were created before the world⁶. In other words, all of creation was created from *teshuvah*, and therefore, all of the creations contain *teshuvah* as part of their inherent makeup: the yearning to return to our source.

“Shov”: The Soul’s Power To Return

However, when a person sins, he loses this yearning to return to his source.

What, then, is the *avodah* of a *baal teshuvah*? The *avodah* is to reveal from within ourselves our inherent power to return. It is not some new power that we need to come up with and develop. Rather, it exists in potential form, deep inside the soul. This is called the power of “*shov*” (return) in the soul.

⁶ *Pesachim 54a*

Thus, if one thinks he has to “come up” with the idea of *teshuvah* over his sins - as if it is something novel - his *teshuvah* will only be temporary inspiration, and it will probably not last after Yom Kippur. But if one reveals the inherent power of *teshuvah* from within his soul (“*shov*”), such *teshuvah* can last for the entire year, for now that he has revealed it, it remains with him long afterward.

It is easy to make resolutions during these days, because our minds are clearer and there is also inspiration in our heart. But after these days end, there are few who can remain with these lofty aspirations. The inspiration we had was strong while it lasted, but it doesn’t remain with us for the rest of the year. But if one worked on himself to reveal the power in his soul to “return”, this power of “return” will escort him during the rest of the year as well, long after the ten days of repentance are over.

Teshuvah in the depths of the soul is the fact that all of creation yearns to return to its source. What prevents a person from accessing this deep source of *teshuvah*? It is essentially our power of *bechirah* (free will) that prevents us, when we choose evil; but when one purifies himself, he uses his *bechirah* to choose good, and he yearns for good - he yearns for Hashem. He reveals a power in even his *nefesh habehaimis* to return to its source, and even more so, he reveals the depth of his *neshamah*, which yearns to return not only to our source, but to “Our Father in Heaven.”

This kind of *teshuvah* is called the soul’s power of “*shov*”, return. It puts a person into contact with the inherent power of all Creation that yearns to return to our source.

The Maharal says that all of Creation wants to return to Hashem, but in man, this nature is more concealed, due to man’s power of free choice, which prevents him from accessing his deep nature to return. But when man purifies himself and he reaches the points of the soul of *seichel nivdal*, *yashrus*, *peshitus*, and *nekudah raishis*, he then reveals the simple nature of the soul of “*shov*”, which wants to return to Hashem.

Once this aspect of the soul is revealed outward, it remains with the person on a more permanent basis, as opposed to just inspiration that comes and goes.

Why is it that most people do not reveal this kind of *teshuvah* in themselves? It is because most people view *teshuvah* as being just repentance from sin. Most people are not aware that *teshuvah* is also about returning to the higher aspects of our self: *seichel nivdal*, *yashrus*, *peshitus*, and *nekuda raishis*. Therefore, the soul’s power of “*shov*” usually remains unrevealed and concealed from the person, and all he will know of is inspiration. The resolutions that he makes as he is inspired usually will not last for the rest of the year, because they are not coming from the point of “*shov*” in the soul.

If All Creations Repent, What Sets Apart Humans From Animals?

All people have the power of “*shov*”, for it is contained in all creations. How, then, is man different from other creations?

Man can either keep returning to his sin again (like someone who says “I will repent, and I will sin” – he uses *teshuvah* as a way to sin), or, he can purify himself and do *teshuvah* over his sins; and even more so, he can do *teshuvah* from the point of “*shov*” in himself.

But this still does not answer the question. Any sensible person who thinks about it can wonder: If *teshuvah* applies to all creations – people, animals, plants, and the non-living – is *teshuvah* in humans unique from the other kinds of *teshuvah*?

If we reflect into it, we can see what sets apart humans from all other creations, with regards to *teshuvah*. Man is called “*medaber*”, a social creature. This enables him to recite *Viduy*, to confess, over sins. This *Viduy* can come from the power of “*shov*” in the soul. It sets man apart from all other creations, who cannot speak or verbalize their *teshuvah*.

The Teshuvah That Is Unique To The Jewish People

Even more so, the *teshuvah* that a Jew is capable of contains an even higher aspect than this.

It is written, “Return, Yisrael, up until (*ad*) Hashem, your G-d.” The Gemara explains that there are two levels of “*ad*”, “up to Hashem: There is “*ad v’lo ad b’klal*”, “up until, but not including until”, and “*ad v’ad b’klal*”, “until, and including until”. The Gemara explains that an individual who does *teshuvah* can only do *teshuvah* “up until” Hashem, but not further than that point; whereas *teshuvah* of on a congregational level can reach all the way until Hashem.

Furthermore, Rabbi Akiva said, “Praiseworthy is Yisrael, for Yisrael is purified by their Father in Heaven.” Only the Jewish people are purified on Yom Kippur by Hashem. This is the Jew’s unique power of *teshuvah*: to return all the way “until” Hashem.

Thus, the power of “*shov*” in our *nefesh habehaimis*, which is the power that all creations have, can only reach up until *ad* Hashem, but not beyond that. It cannot actually return us all the way to Hashem. Beyond that level, we can do *teshuvah* through *Viduy*, which utilizes our aspect of *medaber* that sets us apart from all other creations.

But all of this is not yet the Jew’s unique power of *teshuvah*. The Jew can do *teshuvah* all the way up “until” Hashem; he is purified by his Father in Heaven on Yom Kippur, as Rabbi Akiva says. He can stand “before Hashem”, on Yom Kippur.

In what way? When it is Yom Kippur, one is able to feel simply that he is standing in front of Hashem. As proof, everyone is hoping that Hashem will forgive him as he stands before Him on Yom Kippur.

As for one who doesn’t feel the presence of Hashem on Yom Kippur, he will still be purified through the “pure waters” that are sprinkled upon his soul on Yom Kippur, but he won’t become purified in his very being.

“Return, Yisrael, up until Hashem your G-d” includes the entire process of *teshuvah*, both on our external layers and our inner layers. The most external layer of *teshuvah* is to repent on the level of the physical body, which can refrain from sinning. The more inner layers of *teshuvah* involved the soul, where one must return the soul’s abilities, as we explained [these were the four aspects explained by the Maharal]. And finally, there is the complete level of *teshuvah*, to return to Hashem Himself, as we pray: *“Return us, Hashem, in complete repentance, before You.”* The place which our *neshamah* must ultimately return to is, to reach the simple recognition of the reality of Hashem.

During the rest of the year there are various obstacles that prevent us from feeling that simple reality, but on Yom Kippur where we are forgiven by Hashem, we can easily relate to feeling Hashem’s presence.

If one doesn’t feel Hashem’s presence on Yom Kippur, he is still atoned for on Yom Kippur, but this atonement and purity will not have penetrated into his entire being, and he will be left with traces of sin even after Yom Kippur. He will not become like a ‘fresh piece of paper’ after Yom Kippur that he could have merited on this day.

In Conclusion

May Hashem give us the strength to recognize the definition of *teshuvah*, to recognize how our soul can do *teshuvah*, so that we can completely reach the meaning of *“Return Yisrael up until Hashem your G-d”* - and may it be an *“ad”* that is *“ad v’ad b’klal”* (up until, and including until): that we should do *teshuvah* “all the way until Hashem”.

May we all merit to sealed for a good year.