

THE ESSENCE OF TESHUVAH

By Ozer Bergman

OK, so it's Elul, the month before Rosh HaShanah, Judgment Day, the day we defend the life we've lived till now—and plead for the gift of life we want to live from now on. *Teshuvah* (returning to God) is a mitzvah that most of us need to do, desperately. *Teshuvah* wipes the slate clean. Whatever bad stuff we did is undone by our *teshuvah* and erased from our history. That's a pretty good deal. So let's briefly review *teshuvah's* components.

First, we have to stop our wrongdoing. Ideally, we should make a commitment so absolute that we never again think about or want to repeat our mistake. (Even if we can't stop cold turkey, reducing the frequency, duration and/or enjoyment of the misdeed are valid and valuable degrees of *teshuvah*.)

Next is regretting what we did wrong, whether it was between us and God (e.g., eating a cheeseburger), or between us and another person (e.g., theft). Regretting what we did wrong can be difficult. After all, at the time we did what we did, we may not have known that it was wrong. Even now, we might not comprehend its wrongness: "It was just a cheeseburger." We may rationalize: "Bill Gates is never going to miss my few dollars." The more our understanding of Jewishness matures, the more our regret—and *teshuvah*—will mature.

The last component is confession. We have to say to God, aloud, something like, "I sinned. I'm sorry that I sinned and I fully commit to never repeat my wrongdoing." Obviously, the less perfect our sincerity, the less perfect our *teshuvah*. But an imperfect *teshuvah* is better than no *teshuvah* at all.

So now we know the rudiments of the mitzvah of *teshuvah*. But what is the essence of returning to God? Rebbe Nachman teaches that the essence of *teshuvah* is—well, how many would you like?

▲ The essence of *teshuvah* is to hear, be insulted, and remain silent, outwardly and inwardly. The essence of *teshuvah* is achieved through humility (LM I, 6:2, 6).

▲ *Teshuvah* means returning each thing to its root—i.e., reattaching it to *Chokhmah*, God's wisdom in Creation. Therefore, one has to learn to control his thinking and keep it within the appropriate areas. This is the essence of *teshuvah* (LM I, 35:1).

▲ The essence of *teshuvah* depends on the heart. That is, the thoughts of one's heart must flee from wrong-thinking and run to right-thinking (LM I, 49:4).

▲ The essence of *teshuvah* depends on Torah. One needs to invest so much effort in its study that he understands one thing from another and innovates new Torah insights—all for the sake of Heaven. This is complete *teshuvah* (RNW #105).

▲ The essence of *teshuvah* is to cry out: "Where is God?!" when you don't sense His presence *at all*. Seeking and searching for God's honor despite the realization of how distant you are from Him, but still ask, out of pain, "Where is the place of His honor?!" (LM II, 12).

▲ The essence of complete *teshuvah* is finding yourself in the identical situation you were in before, facing the same temptation, but now turning your back on it, forcing your inclination to not give in to the wrong. This is the essence of *teshuvah*, and only this is called *teshuvah* (LM II, 49).

▲ The essence of *teshuvah* is shame, to feel great shame in God's presence. One merits this by spending time with a genuine tzaddik (LM II, 72).

▲ The essence of complete *teshuvah* requires having a connection with genuine tzaddikim (RNW #71).

What do these essences have in common? Order. Through the study of the Torah—its verbal manifestation (sacred texts) and its flesh-and-blood manifestation (holy tzaddikim)—we recognize that there is a Divine presence in the world. We can then start to arrange life so that the world runs as peacefully and beautifully as it should. We realize how much God deserves honor and that we should promote it. We realize how much we should eschew honor. We realize that maintaining *Chokhmah*, the ordered wisdom of God's world, requires us to cultivate and control the wisdom of our minds and hearts.

SIDEPATH

Rebbe Nachman teaches that charity is the *tikkun* of wealth (LM I, 69:end), and the *tikkun* of wealth is the aspect of unity—the antithesis of "The more possessions, the more worry" (*Avot* 2:7). Therefore it is customary to give charity before prayer in order to remedy this and attain inner unity. One's prayer is then infused with the perception that everything is good and everything is one (*Likutey Halakhot, Matzranot* 1, end).

Eventually, with God's help, we progress to the point that God places us in the identical situation in which we failed in the past. Understanding one thing from another, we know how to properly place God, our selves and our inclination so that God's world is set aright.

May it happen swiftly and soon, in our lifetime. Amen.

*agutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!*

(Based on selections from *Likutey Moharan* and *Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom*)

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

21:10 When you go out to war against your enemy and God your Lord will deliver him into your hand, you will take captives

Two Ways To Serve God

There are two ways to serve God: through honest business practices and through Torah study.

The latter is on a higher level, as we see from Moshe's blessing to the Tribes of Yissachar and Zevulun: "Rejoice, Zevulun, when you go out [to engage in business], and Yissachar, in your tent [learning Torah]" (Deuteronomy 33:18). Zevulun's devotion is called "go out," whereas Yissachar's devotion is "in your tent"—implying something with a deep, inner meaning.

In the present verse, the phrase “go out to war” refers to conducting business. Business is a battleground in which a person must fight against his evil inclination in order to maintain his honesty and integrity—which rectifies and elevates sparks of holiness. With faith, one can win the war.

Then he can “take captives”—a reference to the Torah, as in “You ascended on high and took a captive” (Psalms 68:19), which Rashi explains alludes to the Torah (LM I, 280).

22:5 A woman should not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing

Truth And Faith Are Not Interchangeable

Man represents truth and understanding. Woman represents faith and the ability to know when not to delve into things beyond the parameters of one's intellect. One must be careful never to change his “garments”—i.e., to change from a garment of truth into a garment of falsehood, or of false faith or idolatry. One must take care not to trust on faith when something can be understood (i.e., one must seek the truth), or to try to understand that which is beyond him (i.e., to have faith) (LH IV, p. 422).

22:7 You should send away the mother bird and take the chicks for yourself

Start Each Day Afresh

The “eggs” and “chicks” represent souls that are weak and far from God due to their sins. One who wishes to draw these souls close should “send away the mother bird”—i.e., chase away the intellects that led these souls onto an evil path. One must teach them to begin anew with a fresh approach, not as if their days are the “same old thing” but as if each day is a new creation (LH IV, p. 99a).

23:11 A nocturnal emission

The Rectification For Wasted Seed

The rectification for a man who has wasted his seed is to draw people close to God. The word *KeRY* (קרי, wasted seed) has the same letters as *YaKaR* (יקר, precious)—i.e., his repentance brings precious souls back to God (LM I, 14:13).

23:24 A promise that you spoke with your mouth

Giving Charity Helps The Tzaddik Teach

Our Sages state that the phrase “with your mouth” refers specifically to a vow to give charity (*Rosh HaShanah* 6a).

When one gives charity, he gives holy power to the spirituality associated with the mouth, which enables the tzaddik to speak words of Torah (LM II, 15).

24:15 On this day you should pay him; the sun should not set upon him

The Joy Of The Mitzvah Is Its Own Reward

One should strive to perform the *mitzvot* with such joy that he feels that he has received his reward in the moment of performing the *mitzvah*, and not in the expectation of a future reward after his “sun sets”—i.e., after he dies (LM I, 5:2).

25:17 Remember what Amalek did to you.

Do Not Let Secular Knowledge Divert You From God

AMaLeK (עמלק) is an acronym for the final letters of the phrase *shevA yipoL tzaddik ve-koM* (שבוע יפול צדיק וקום), seven times a tzaddik falls but rises) (Proverbs 24:16).

There are seven types of wisdom (mathematics, logic, rhetoric, etc.). Each of these can lead a person to God—but each also contains a stumbling block which can deflect him to heresy, which is associated with Amalek. Thus, Amalek represents the philosophers and atheists who constantly attempt to tear people away from God (LM II, 19).

KITZUR L" M WEEKLY

4 — “I am God, your Lord” (Exodus 20:2)
(continued)

13. The choice few of the greatest tzaddikim draw a glimmer of the light of the Infinite into all those who draw close [to them] and who are included in their name. This explains why we see that sometimes a person is suddenly overcome with enthusiasm in the midst of his prayers, and utters a few words of the prayers with great fervor. This is because God, out of His compassion for him, has opened to him the light of the Infinite and shines for him. When a person sees this glimmer—“even though he does not see it, his *mazal* sees it” (*Megillah* 3a)—at once his soul burns fervently to attach itself to the

light of the Infinite. As long as the revelation of the Infinite lasts, and for all those words during which [this light] is opened up to him and shines for him, he says all these words with a cleaving to God, with self-transcendence and with a nullification of all his sensory faculties. A person merits all this by means of the greatest of the true tzaddikim, because only they know about God, about the light of the Infinite, and only they shine this lovely glimmer onto us, which “each person experiences according to his own heart's understanding” (*Zohar* I, 103b).

14. During the time that a person is nullified before the Infinite, he is in the aspect of “no man knew” (Deuteronomy 34:6, referring to Moses' burial place), since even he himself is not aware of himself. But this state must be experienced by “running and returning” in order for a person to continue to exist as a being “separate” from God and not expire before his time, God forbid. For the Holy One, Blessed be He, desires our service; therefore, he must not remain in this state, but [should wait] until the time that the Holy One, Blessed be He, will Himself come and take his soul [when he passes away]. Then he will be completely nullified and absorbed in the Infinite to whatever degree that he merits.



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