

אלול: Returning to HaShem

A collection of articles on the theme of teshuva.

Elul 5773

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INTRODUCTION

Elul is fast approaching, it comes every year and yet every year we often feel unprepared. We all know now is the time for teshuva, we all know that our efforts in Elul will be a springboard into the Yomin Naorim. How do we take this knowledge and make it a reality?

How to perform teshuva is clear, as stated in the Rambam¹:

1. Recognize and discontinue the improper action.
2. Verbally confess the action before HaShem
3. Genuine regret.
4. Determine never to repeat the action.

In four simple steps anyone can perform the positive mitzvah of teshuva. Find a quiet spot, (or, more often than not, speak quietly in a loud spot) and say over your verbal confession to HaShem. Elaborate your regret and honest commitment not to repeat the action². Pour out your heart to HaShem.

For the sincere Jew teshuva is a simple mitzvah to perform! These four steps of teshuva are accessible to all and certainly one must and should engage in this positive mitzvah at every opportunity.

With this in mind we must be aware that there are many, many levels to teshuva. The depth and beauty of teshuva could take a life time to discover – Rebbe Nachman tells us the great tzadikim are masters of teshuva!

And yet for many of us, anything more than the simple act of teshuva can sometimes escape us, such avodahs appear beyond our capabilities and means. Therefore during these special days of Elul, may the words of our Rabbonim and teacher's guide us in making a teshuva shleima and in fulfilling the positive commandment of teshuva on the highest level that is accessible to us.

HaShem wants *you* to be the best version of *you* (and *me* to be the best *me*!). For sure the Baal Shem Tov's teshuva was something special, for sure Rebbe Nachman's teshuva was beyond our comprehension. Yet HaShem doesn't require such devotions from us (right now at this stage we are in) - HaShem wants us to do the best *we* can do. This Elul may we all realise who the real *me* is and merit to follow the path of teshuva and avodah which helps to best reveal that hidden me and shlep that *little me* a little closer to HaShem.

¹ Hilchos Teshuva, Mishneh Torah, Rambam. Halacha 1

² Loshon HaRambam there: *"This confession is a positive command. How does one confess: He states: "I implore You, God, I sinned, I transgressed, I committed iniquity before You by doing the following. Behold, I regret and am embarrassed for my deeds. I promise never to repeat this act again." These are the essential elements of the confessional prayer. **Whoever confesses profusely and elaborates on these matters is worthy of praise**"*

ENTERING INTO THE AVODAH OF TESHUVA

HGHM YITZCHOK MYER MORGENSTERN SHLITA

“BEHOLD, I SET BEFORE YOU THIS DAY A BLESSING AND A CURSE.”¹

Rashi explains: “Behold, I set before you...a blessing and a curse’ —Which were intoned at Mount Gerizim and Moutn Eival. ‘A blessing’—in order that you should heed.”

The Ohr HaChayim HaKadosh explains that the words, “Behold, I...” can be understood in a completely different way. Moshe Rabbeinu was asking the Jewish people to “behold him,” to really look at him, and see his level and holiness.

Every Jew wants to repent and achieve every good and holy thing, but the moment he looks toward others around him he falls into doubt. [When we pay too much attention to those around us, we lose our inspiration because living inspired is considered unusual.] In response, Moshe Rabbeinu says that this is an error, because a person must instead focus on the holiness of the *tzaddikim* of his generation, not just his normal acquaintances, and not even just the *tzaddikim* of his generation but the greatest *tzaddikim* of all the generations. Moshe Rabbeinu says, “Behold, I...” Behold me, look toward me, and you will be able to achieve all that you can spiritually. As the Rambam taught, every person can reach the level of Moshe Rabbeinu [in his own unique way, based on his own potential]. Even if a person fell and sinned, he can still repent completely and become a part of the true *tzaddik*, Moshe the faithful shepherd.

Although it is clear that every single one of us longs to fear and serve Hashem and become a part of the nature of the true *tzaddik*, nevertheless the evil inclination erects obstacles to prevent our souls from achieving the goal.

Even when a person feels inspired to serve Hashem, nevertheless the *sitra achra* interrupts him and tries to tempt him away from his purpose with all sorts of nonsense. The person strays blindly after these temptations and falls into the category of a woman who suddenly received an impure flow [which interrupts her ability to form a *yichud* in holiness]. In the middle of his Torah study, his mind is suddenly filled with distracting thoughts, and the *sitra achra* plagues his every attempt to serve Hashem and confuses him. This parallels the serpent’s approaching Chavah and the manner in which he seduced her into eating from the Tree of Knowledge.

Now that Elul is swiftly approaching, the Jewish people begin to remember that there are such *tzaddikim* like Moshe Rabbeinu; we begin to remember the message of, “Behold, I...” Certainly we all long to repent completely, and it is part of our nature to be drawn to all different forms of *avodah* and to want to raise up holy sparks at every turn. Yet if a person is not sufficiently the master of his own appetites, the *sitra achra* quickly overwhelms him when he descends to do the *avodah* that draws him, like a predator rising from the depths. The Arizal explained that this is only par for the course, since the moment a person is aroused to repentance, the *sitra achra* works to confound him so that he will fall even more. The person imagines that he has failed, and it is all the more disappointing to him since he really did feel a genuine arousal to repentance. All of this is the work of the *sitra achra*.

The truth is that although one must certainly repent and achieve all of the great levels of the *tzaddikim*, nevertheless Moshe Rabbeinu continued his statement, “Behold I set before you this day a blessing and a curse.” We must work to make *beirurim/spiritual clarifications*, but not in a manner that provokes the *sitra achra* and makes a blessing into a curse, that makes our *teshuvah* into a means for the evil inclination to overwhelm us. We require instead a great measure of holy awareness so that we can follow the path of *teshuvah* of “guarding My Sabbaths and revering My sanctuary”—a *teshuvah* that will last.

¹ Devarim 11:26

Yirmiyahu the prophet declared: “But let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me...”² The main purpose of our existence is to understand and know Hashem wherever we find ourselves. When we do this, we uplift and reveal Hashem’s presence from within the lower worlds. As the deeper works explain, “Behold, I...” We must seek out and uplift the אֱלֹהִים, the Divine “I” which is the attribute of *Malchus* by accepting upon ourselves the yoke of the kingdom of heaven. This is what is meant by “revering My sanctuary”—having an awareness of Hashem’s presence in every place.

The first step in the process of genuine repentance is simplicity, as Rebbe Nachman said many times.³ One must be wary of stoking the heart into a state of burnout, because an overabundance of oil will quench the flame altogether. One must instead focus on extracting one spark after the other—not in the way of *ribui ohr* or over-fervor that leads to burnout—because many people fail to understand that *Malchus* can only be uplifted from level to level, gradually. At first, *Malchus* is in a state of spiritual immaturity or *katnus*, and so one must enter into *avodas Hashem* in a manner consistent with one’s actual spiritual level. “Neither shall you go up steps to My altar, that your nakedness not be uncovered upon it.”⁴ You shall not try to race up the levels of *avodah* quickly—rather, they must be traversed ever so slowly, from level to level. Even though we must be filled with a longing to reach all of the highest levels—even to the level of Moshe Rabbeinu—nevertheless we must follow the path of *teshuvah* step-by-step, from level to level, and avoid the pitfall of the “figured stone.”

The most elementary level of approaching *dveikus* is through the letters of Torah study and prayer themselves, since Hashem enclothes Himself in countless garments until He is actually enclothed by the holy letters that we can read black on white. Even though this garment is relatively coarse, nevertheless we must begin by seeking *dveikus* at this level. We must contemplate them in the manner of accepting upon ourselves the yoke of heaven—this is the *avodah* of bearing the yoke of Torah and prayer expressed through the letters. One must begin with this *avodah* and never leave off from it. Having entered into it, one can then rise to the next level of feeling love and awe of Hashem. The world of *Asiyah* is associated with action, and the world of *Yetzirah* is associated with speech. The world of *Beriyah* is associated with thought, and the ultimate level is that one comes to feel the light of Hashem’s *yichud* in accordance with one’s level. Yet even at this exalted level, one must never leave off the “simple” work of *dveikus* through the letters of Torah and prayer, which is the fundamental nature of the world of *Asiyah*.

This level is not only the garment of the letters, but also the garment of all of material reality. One must look at the world and remember that there is no reality but Hashem, and one’s perception of reality must be nullified before one’s awareness of Hashem’s overwhelming presence. This awareness allows a person to transcend the material plane.

We find this idea discussed by Rav Nosson of Breslov, when he interprets the verse, “You are children to Hashem your G-d; you shall not cut yourselves [over the dead]...”⁵ He writes, “Because you are Hashem’s children, you must know that it is not appropriate to mortify your flesh in undue distress over death and burial. Even this is good, because it allows the soul to be repaired. So too, when a person enters into the *avodah* of prayer, he must rise above all of the matters of the material world and not allow himself to be unduly distressed over anything, even over matters of suffering and death, G-d forbid. If he will do this, he will merit to live in Hashem’s light and really experience what it means to be a child of Hashem. When one stands to pray, he must forget about everything, and only think of Hashem alone and bind himself to the letters of Hashem’s Torah and prayers. He must forget himself and all that he lacks. Even though it is certainly true that he must pray for his needs, nevertheless when he first enters into prayer he must strip himself of all worldly thoughts and only focus on the words of the prayer themselves.”⁶

As the Baal Shem Tov taught, every person must know that the letters of Torah and prayer are heavenly

² Yirmiyahu 9:23

³ Likutei Moharan I:49

⁴ Shemos 20:22

⁵ Devarim 14:1

⁶ Likutei Halachos, Birchos HaShachar 3

chambers, and there are in every letter—how much more so in every word—entire spiritual worlds. One can enter into these letters and mental states until one feels the actual light of this letter, and one can enter even further and feel the love and awe within that letter, and to the *bitul* within that letter, and to bind oneself to the Divine light that it is in that letter. And one can rise higher and higher until one reaches Hashem's essence itself, as it were, that reposes within that letter. All of this exists within every single letter of Torah and prayer—levels and levels of *yichudim* that reach all the way to the Infinite One. This is the main upward movement one must seek—to rise from light to light, from one state of awareness to the next, from letter to letter—to enter the *avodah* of *Asiyah* and follow the pathway of higher and higher *dveikus*.

Even so, one must be sure not to jump levels or abandon the path of simplicity, because this provokes the *sitra achra*. The Komarna Rebbe taught that true *dveikus* completely destroys all of the *klippas* and rectifies one's soul through all of its former incarnations going all the way back to Adam HaRishon. Because it is so important, the *sitra achra* lies in wait for the person who tries to get ahead of himself in his *avodah*. For this reason, it is crucial to go slowly from level to level, not in the way of *ribui ohr*.

The *tzaddikim*, on the other hand, can make all of the necessary *beirurim* quickly because they have sanctified themselves to a great degree. Since they have achieved the level of, “revering My sanctuary,” they hold within themselves the power of, “guarding My Sabbaths.” Just as it was possible to perform certain labors within the confines of the sanctuary on Shabbos, so too can the *tzaddikim* make many *beirurim* at once and even on Shabbos. Because they are in a constant state of awareness of Hashem's presence through the letters of Torah and prayer, their *avodah* burns away all of the *klippas* as they rise quickly from level to level. Inasmuch as a person is holding at the level of the “sanctuary” [of being the master of his appetites], to that degree will he also be able to follow the path of the *tzaddikim* and make *beirurim* swiftly. But if he is not, he must be careful to move gradually.

During this month of Elul we must learn to be “experts at running”—to rise to the level of the greatest of *tzaddikim* through full repentance—and at the same time we must be “experts at returning”⁷—to move slowly and gradually in accordance with our level, so that the *sitra achra* does not cause us to fall.

⁷ *Likutei Moharan* I:6

WHAT IS TESHUVAH? ¹

HRHG OZER BERGMAN SHLITA

What is *teshuvah*? *Teshuvah* is change—change of behavior, change of heart and change of mind.

When we change from cheeseburgers to *chulent*, from bar-hopping to *beis midrash*-going, and *g'neivisheh* shtick to kosher gelt, our new behaviors indicate (to others, but most importantly to ourselves) that other changes have taken place within us. Outside motions are sometimes nothing more than an act, but they are more often a test of our inner resolve.

Did we really have a change of heart? Did we really take stock of the gifts that Hashem *Yisborakh* (Blessed God) gave and gives us? Not just the sweet-tasting gifts, mind you, but the ones that make us sweat and put our shoulder to the grindstone, and the ones that make us weep. Did we stop to think about the gap between what we sense, what we intuit deep inside of our heart about what we know is the purpose of our life and what we really do, how we actually spend our time? Did we hear the inaudible scream of our heart that mourns the disconnect between our inborn *Yiddishe neshamah* and our lives hijacked by *galus Edom* (the current exile)?

Our outer changes give an indication that yes, we did. We felt, all things considered, life had to change, so we changed it. But our inner discontent, that nagging feeling that it's not enough, that the gap is still too large, is a better indicator that our change of heart is still effective, still evolving, still pumping new life into our *Yiddishkeit*.

But after all this wonderful and necessary change, did we change our minds?

We all know the famous Gemara (*Kiddushin* 49b), that if a man says to a woman, “You are my wife on condition that I am a tzaddik,” she is married to him (if she said yes!). No matter what crimes he has done, no matter how often, no matter for how long he has been doing them, she is wife. Why? The Gemara explains, “Maybe he had a thought of *teshuvah*.”

He didn't put on tzitzit or tefillin, didn't give *tzedakkah* (charity) or drop his ham sandwich — yet. Nothing. But already, despite not doing anything positive, he is already a complete tzaddik because of one thought, “I will improve on my Jewishness.”

This Gemara has a flipside. If a man, even a known tzaddik, says to a woman, “You are my wife on condition that I am a *rasha* (villain),” she is married to him (again, if she said yes). Why? The Gemara explains, “Maybe he had a thought of idolatry.”

Another famous Gemara (*Kiddushin* 39b). A youngster climbs a tree to do the mitzvah of *shiluach hakein* at his father's request, falls and dies. Acher didn't understand how a person doing the two mitzvahs for which the holy Torah promises long life could die while doing them! The Gemara answers that the youngster had his thoughts focused on *avodah zarah* (idolatry). The value of what you do—including *teshuvah*—is set by your mind.

I once asked Reb Shlomo Freifeld *zal* why *teshuvah* is easier at the beginning stages, but becomes progressively harder as one continues his journey. He answered, “At first *teshuvah* is like cutting off a

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gangrened limb. Then it becomes brain surgery.” He was referring to the elimination of the many subtle traces of the poisonous influences that infect our motivation, our ego-worship and our greed among them.

I want to elaborate. We who have grown up in *galus* (exile), regardless which nation was our host, have been so attacked by goyish culture, attitudes and values that we are concussed. Without even realizing it, we have goals that are not Jewish, standards that are not Jewish, and ways and methods for dealing with ordinary (and extraordinary) situations that are not Jewish. (Of course, by “Jewish” I mean that which the holy Torah recommends or, at the very least, sanctions.)

That is, for the most part, we think like goyim. What’s worse is, we aren’t even aware that we do.

I’m not an anti-Esavian or an anti-Ishmaelite. On the contrary. I’m a member of the minute minority that holds that *v’ahavta l’reiakha k’mokha* means to love goyim as well. (Yes, there is such a pre-19th century *deah*.) Doesn’t mean I want to be one or think like one, God forbid.

The real test of our *teshuvah*—and do yourself a favor: be ready to be tested over and over for the rest of your life—is how we think when confronted with a challenge. Do we analyze, reflect and consider our challenge(s) solely by the Torah’s attitude? Or do we mix in some political doctrine, philosophical inquiry or scientific bias in trying to figure out what the desired outcome is and how we might achieve it?

Let me be a bit more blunt. When we have a problem, where do we go for a solution? To the Torah? Or, God forbid, to Google? When we need a *modus operandi* for a situation, do we search for it with a *talmid chakham*, a Jew saturated with Torah knowledge and experience, or some bright guy with a Ph.D.?^{*}

Teshuvah never ends. Up to and including our dying moment, we have to be vigilant that what (and how) we do, what we want and how we see life, fits the Divine wisdom we call Torah. It’s not always easy—even with Rabbeinu *zal*, good friends and *hisbodedus* helping us—but, hey, God chose you. You can do it—if you want to.

^{*}I am quite aware that the ability to give good advice is not produced only by knowledge and level of religious observance. It also requires *seikhe!*

THE TRUTH HURTS

HRHG NISSON DOVID KIVAK SHLITA

Everyone knows that Torah 6 is Rebbe Nachman's Torah about teshuvah.

Torah 6 was one of the first lessons Reb Noson heard from Rebbe Nachman and it is one that he lived with for the rest of his life. In this Torah we find: Elul, Rosh Hashanah and the Rebbe's instruction on how to do teshuvah, yet when we come to study it, we may well find ourselves confused. Let's review what the Rebbe teaches there:

- The Rebbe starts this Torah about teshuvah talking about honour. A person has to "*minimize his own honour and maximize Hashem's honour.*"
- There are two types of honour – "Kingly honour" and "G-dly honour." When a person has "Kingly honour", people question his worthiness of it, but when he has "G-dly honour" nobody questions it. The way we attain this "G-dly honour", says the Rebbe, is through teshuvah, repentance.
- The principal way to do teshuvah is through "hearing oneself being shamed and not responding" – "שומע בזיונו ידום וישתוק".
- Teshuvah is to be a lifelong process - the Rebbe describes it as a path that we must constantly move along.
- To do this we need to become "experts," and there are two types of expertise we need – the first is to know how to constantly keep striving for more and more closeness to Hashem, which he calls being "*baki b'ratzo*", an expert at moving forward. The second expertise is to know how to encourage ourselves and find Hashem even when we are down – called being "*baki b'shov*", an expert at coming back.

These are the main points of this Torah, and they leave us with quite a few questions. Teshuvah, as we understand it simply, is about repenting for the sins we've committed. There is an order to it, as spelled out by the Rambam in his *Hilchos Teshuvah* – we are to regret what we've done, confess it to Hashem, stop engaging in the forbidden behaviour and commit to not return to sinning. The notion of honour doesn't seem to fit anywhere into this?

The Rebbe says that we attain "G-dly honour" by doing teshuvah. Surely we should do teshuvah because we've done wrong, not in the pursuit of honour, which the Rebbe himself starts off by saying is the opposite of what we are supposed to be doing?

Furthermore, shouldn't "G-dly honour" be reserved for Hashem, not for us?

Teshuvah, as we understand it simply, is about correcting what we've done wrong. Once it's done, it's done. Why does the Rebbe say that teshuvah is an on-going, never-ending process?

The Rebbe says that the principal way of doing teshuvah is to hear oneself being shamed and not respond. What if no-one shames us – how are we to repent then?

How can we make sense of all of this?

The Rebbe certainly didn't come to negate any of the traditional forms of doing teshuvah. Regret, confession, forsaking sin and commitment to not return to wrongdoing are all essential parts of teshuvah. The Rebbe isn't giving us a permit to bypass any of these. When we contemplate his holy words, though, we see how he penetrates right to the heart of what teshuvah is all about, and how he gives us the keys to achieve it on the deepest level.

זה היום תהילת מעשיך (from the Rosh Hashanah liturgy) Adam HaRishon, the first man, was created on Rosh Hashanah. His purpose – to reveal Hashem's glory in the world. The greatest mountains, planets and animals

are all incapable of this, because they lack free will. Man is the only being capable of crowning G-d King over the world, because only he is able to choose to listen to Him or disobey Him. **אין מלך בלא עם** - A King is only a King when he has a populace of people subservient to him. Adam fell. He went after his own understanding and disobeyed Hashem's command. Our task on this day is to correct his mistake and come back to the true status of "Man."

In Torah 82 (Likutei Moharan II) the Rebbe teaches us that life goes either "in order" or "in disorder," and he connects these ideas to **אדם** and **חווה** respectively. When our lives are "in order" (**אדם**) things are going smoothly – we are learning, praying, progressing. When things are in "disorder" (**חווה**), nothing is going as we want it to, nothing works out. The Rebbe tells us that when we find ourselves in the latter situation, it's due to arrogance. We need to do teshuva and humble ourselves.

ויכשורא אדם בעצמו, שהולך לו שלא כסדר ידע, שיש לו גדלות, הינו: אָנָא אִמְלִיךְ - יַעֲשֶׂה תְּשׁוּבָה וַיִּשְׁפִּיל אֶת עַצְמוֹ
When a person sees in himself, that things aren't going in order, he should know that he has arrogance, meaning, "I will rule." He must repent and humble himself.

Our biggest mistake is saying "I will rule," and this is the root of all sin. When we humbly submit ourselves to Hashem's will, we return to the status of man, **אדם**, and things return to order.

Getting frustrated, bitter and depressed when life doesn't go how we want it to are signs that we're trying to take the Kingship for ourselves. Somewhere inside, we are saying, "I will rule. I know best. Things *should* be like this. If they aren't, I'm going to be annoyed." Teshuvah is about returning the Kingship to Hashem, and submitting ourselves to His will. Acknowledging that *He* knows best, and accepting this. *This* is what the Rebbe means by attaining **כבוד אלקי**, "G-dly honour." The honour is not for us. Someone who has attained "G-dly honour" is someone who lives his life solely for Hashem's honour.

Elul is a time when things often go haywire, a time we often find ourselves in deep "disorder." There's a good reason for this – Hashem is nudging us to do something we really don't want to do, and may have managed to avoid doing for a long time – to take a really good look at ourselves in the mirror. It can be very painful. "*Der emes tut veh*", goes the saying in Yiddish – the truth hurts.

To take an honest look at ourselves - at where we've been all year, at how we've lived, how we've used our time, how we've said our blessings, how we've prayed, how we've guarded our eyes and thoughts, how we've learned, how we've interacted with others, how we've got frustrated, bitter and depressed when things didn't go as we had wanted them to. It hurts to see all this, but the Rebbe understands and steps right in to take us by the hand,

וְעָקַר הַתְּשׁוּבָה - כְּשִׁישְׁמַע בְּיָוֵנוּ, יָדָם וַיִּשְׁתַּק
The principal teshuvah is to hear oneself being shamed, and not respond.

You've done it. You looked in the mirror and saw yourself, warts and all. That's all the shaming you need. There's no need to respond – don't beat yourself up, or ruminate about it. All Hashem wanted was that you see yourself as you are. You've had your shaming now. You're embarrassed? Excellent - you've broken your pride and returned the Kingship to Hashem. You're a true Man. Now what you need is the next stage of teshuvah – to be *baki b'shov*, to know that Hashem is with you and loves you right where you are. What He asks from you now is to rejoice in Him and His mitzvos.

On the day of judgment itself, when we pass by Hashem and His Heavenly tribunal one by one, with all our deeds laid out for all above to see; on the day when we feel the greatest shame and embarrassment about how we've lived the past year – on that very same day the Rebbe tells us to be full of joy and confidence that Hashem will bless us with everything good. The two go together.

This is the teshuvah of Elul and Rosh Hashanah – to return the Kingship to Hashem and serve Him with joy. When we surrender our will and desire to rule, and fill our hearts instead with a desire to serve Hashem and maximise His glory, we return to the status of Hashem's beloved children, and all harsh judgment melts away. This is true teshuvah, and it's not reserved for Elul and Rosh Hashanah - it's a joyous path that the Rebbe wants us to travel a bit further down, each and every day.

LIKUTEY MOHARAN #141¹

FOOTNOTES BY RAV CHAIM KRAMER, BRESLOV RESEARCH INSTITUTE

If a person is worthy—i.e., he has circumcised the foreskin of his heart—he will truly feel the anguish caused by his sins². This is because as long as his heart is uncircumcised and sealed up, it is impossible for him to truly feel.

Only when he circumcises the foreskin of his heart, so that he has a hollow in his heart³, can his heart then truly feel the magnitude of his anguish. He will truly feel sorrow and remorse. And then, due to the magnitude of the remorse, all the hearts of all the drops [of seed] drawn out of him will also feel. No matter to what place they were drawn, there, in that place they will feel; whether they are those [drops] drawn from him that became his human offspring, or those drawn from him to another place, God forbid. There, too, they have a heart and other limbs.⁴

¹ **Likutey Moharan #141.** This lesson was given on Rosh Chodesh Elul (year unknown). Rebbe Nachman was walking with Reb Noson outside the synagogue. The Rebbe asked Reb Noson if he had experienced fear that morning. The Rebbe said that he himself had been overcome with awe when he heard the blowing of the shofar. (Throughout the month of Elul, the custom is to sound the shofar following the Morning Prayer, to arouse the people to repentance before Rosh HaShanah; see Orach Chaim 581:1). Afterwards, Rebbe Nachman's daughter, Adil, came to him and said, "My heart filled with fear after hearing the shofar." Rebbe Nachman then gave over this lesson, the theme of which is how a father's actions and feelings, in particular his repentance or misdeeds, can affect his offspring (Tzaddik #165; Parparaot LeChokhmah).

² **foreskin of his heart....** Rashi explains the words in Leviticus (11:43), "v'NiTMeiTEm bom (you will be defiled by them)"—(v'NiTaMTeM, which connotes being filled with impurity and foolishness by sin. As the Rebbe explains shortly, a person who sins—especially sexual transgressions—causes his heart to be immersed in foolishness. The more he sins, the more he loses control. To "circumcise the foreskin"—i.e. remove the evil inclination—he must pray very hard and do his utmost to repent and return to God. By doing so, he will truly come to realize and feel the extent of the damage generated by his transgressions.

³ **hollow in his heart.** This hollow in the heart contrasts the foolishness that fills his heart. As King David said (Psalms 109:22), "My heart is hollow within me." Our Sages learn from this that King David had completely subdued his evil inclination (Avodah Zarah 4b). A hollow heart thus connotes a pure heart, one that knows remorse and feels the anguish of sin.

⁴ **another place....** The Talmud teaches (Eruvin 18b): After Adam sinned, he abstained for one hundred thirty years from having relations with Chavah. During that time he experienced emissions of seed, from which were created spirits and demons. Moreover, it is written (2 Samuel 7:14), "I will smite him with human punishment and with the plagues of the children of Adam." Rashi explains that these "children" were the demons that Adam fathered. The production of seed produces life with or without a body. Even in a case where conception cannot occur, e.g., a pregnant or older woman, souls are conceived. Thus, there are those who engage in marital relations according to the halakhah and produce offspring; there are some who, through a forbidden marriage or relationship, produce illegitimate offspring; and some, God forbid, who masturbate and so produce bodiless offspring, spirits and demons. These spirits, also considered one's offspring, reside in "another place," which Rebbe Nachman next says is a filthy abyss.

Consequently, when he circumcises his heart, and his heart feels the magnitude of his anguish so that he starts to truly feel sorrow and remorse, then all the hearts of the drops will feel it there.⁵ The truth will be made known to them; how they have been set in filthy places, in the nethermost abyss.

For, at first, they think they have it good, because they wreak havoc on the world.⁶ But afterwards, once their hearts are circumcised—as a result of the circumcision of their father's heart—they take note of where they are and begin to lament and grieve. This creates a great commotion there, in their midst.⁷

This is the meaning of (Deuteronomy 30:6), "The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed"—when God circumcises his heart, the heart of his seed will also be circumcised. [Such is the case] wherever the seed was drawn: if to [conceive] a human being, then his children will of necessity also experience thoughts of repentance due to the circumcision of their father's heart; and if it was drawn somewhere else, God forbid, then the hearts will be circumcised there and they will feel, as mentioned.⁸

Now, the most propitious time for this is the month of Elul. For ELUL is an acrostic for "Et L'vavekha V'et L'vav (your heart and the heart of)." In other words, God should circumcise his heart and whatever heart is dependent upon him, no matter where they were drawn, as above.⁹ This refers to the hearts of the drops in

⁵ **all the hearts...feel it there.** At first glance, Rebbe Nachman seems to be referring specifically to the non-human offspring. Yet, "then all the hearts of the drops will feel" implies that even one's human offspring

will sense their father's sorrow and remorse. Although they may not be there, in the filthy places and the abyss, they, too, have been influenced by their father's lack of perfection and so must unclog their hearts through "circumcision of the foreskin"—i.e., repentance.

⁶ **wreak havoc on the world.** The spirits and demons created from wasted seed become instruments of punishment (see Rashi, 2 Samuel 7:14). They exact retribution by punishing those who produced them, as well as others, for "once a *mashchit* (a destroying force) is given permission to act in the world, no distinction is made between the wicked and the righteous" (Bava Kama 60b). These spirits are thus free to wreak havoc and destruction by bringing physical and monetary harm, and even death, to many, many people. Rebbe Nachman's story "The Cripple" (Rabbi Nachman's Stories, #3 pp.82-104) addresses this issue of the extensive damage wrought by demons and spirits.

⁷ **great commotion there....** In the filthy places and abyss there is great commotion, for there, too, a desire to repent and be rectified has been aroused. Nevertheless, it is much harder to rectify spirits, beings without bodies. This is why the sin of wasted seed is so dreadful. Yet, it, too, can be rectified, although the self-mortification and fasting required by earlier authorities are staggering (see *Likutey Halakhot, Tefilin* 2:11; see also *Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #141). Here, Rebbe Nachman teaches that the initial act towards rectification of this blemish is to circumcise the foreskin of one's heart—i.e. to feel regret over one's past transgressions and repent. This arouses his "seed" so that his offspring also feel a need for rectification. Rebbe Nachman also teaches: "*Das ersht iz mikvah*," one must first immerse oneself in a mikvah to rectify an emission. Then, one should recite the ten psalms known as the "General Remedy" (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom*, *ibid.*; see below, n.12).

⁸ **as mentioned.** Here, Rebbe Nachman brings support from Scripture that circumcising one's heart arouses one's seed. When "your heart" is circumcised, the "heart of your seed" is also circumcised.

⁹ **whatever heart is dependent...as above.** The letters of the name ELUL (אלול) are the same as the first letters of the verse from Deuteronomy quoted in the text: Et L'vavekha V'et L'vav (ללבב ואת לבבך את); the letter vav can be vowelized as an "O" or a "U)." Rebbe Nachman's proof that this refers to all offspring, not just his children but whatever hearts are dependent upon him, is that the word which immediately follows is not *banekha* (your children) but the more inclusive term *zarekha* (your seed). It thus refers to the hearts of all his seed, whether in human form or otherwise.

The Oneg Shabbat states that this lesson and its accompanying prayer in *Likutey Tefilot* (I, #85) are so important and helpful for repentance, that one should recite them every day during the month of Elul (pp. 463, 473, 486).

whatever place they were drawn, whether they were drawn and from them were produced his human offspring, or even if they were drawn to another place, God forbid. For these, too, are his children and are dependent upon him.¹⁰

Therefore, when a person dies, they walk behind the bier and lament over him. They behave exactly as his human children. But this that they march in the procession and lament over him is a great disgrace and humiliation for him.¹¹ Heaven protect us! Heaven protect us from these punishments! As is known.¹²

¹⁰ **dependent upon him.** He must support them, too. This is why many people undergo great hardship in earning a livelihood, because blemishing the Covenant (which is associated with sexual purity) causes poverty (see *Likutey Moharan* I, 7:excerpts and n.80).

¹¹ **behind the bier...humiliation for him.** Because the spirits and demons are also his offspring, they join in the funeral procession and lament his passing, may God save us. This is the reason why in Jerusalem and elsewhere the custom is for a man's children not to follow his bier during the funeral. Rather, they rend their garments at the site from which the procession begins and then return home. This is so that just as one's human offspring refrain from following the bier, the "other offspring" will also not take part; their participation, understandably, would be a source of great disgrace and humiliation for the deceased. (Children do attend their mother's funeral. Parents, brothers and sisters also accompany the bier.)

¹² **... As is known.** This teaching regarding spirits and demons appears in the *Shnei Luchot HaBrit* (Mesikhta Pesachim, p.25). Similarly, the *Zohar* (I, 219b) speaks about how the fruits of one's labor in this world are destroyed by his spilling seed. The offspring he produces are left "naked," without a body, and he must engage in extensive repentance for his misdeeds. Such spirits can remain without rectification for many centuries, until they merit to inhabit a human body (see *The Breslov Haggadah*, Appendix A, pp.1-3; see also *Shaar HaKavanot*, *Drushei HaLaylah* 7). The *Shnei Luchot HaBrit* (*ibid.*) explains that in the meantime, these spirits have the power to attach themselves to a person's body through the hair and nails (both of which are considered "extraneous" because they are not vital to the body, but are cut off at no cost, just as the *kelipot* are extraneous forces).

This is why immersing in a mikvah after an emission is so important. By ceasing to breathe and entering the water totally, man, who is the element of earth and requires the element of air for survival, symbolically negates himself. This signifies the negation of his own will and, conversely, his desire to perform God's will. He is thereby purified; the *kelipot*/spirits which have attached themselves to him, because they are the element of air/spirit and cannot exist underwater, depart (*Likutey Halakhot*, *Mikvaot* 1:2). Reb Noson adds that immersing in the mikvah during the month of Elul is particularly propitious for repentance (*ibid.* 1:2).

As mentioned, after immersion, Rebbe Nachman prescribed the recital of ten specific psalms known as *Tikkun HaKlali* (The General Remedy). These ten psalms are: 16; 32; 41; 42; 59; 77; 90; 105; 137; 150. They serve as a comprehensive rectification for all sins, most specifically for the sin of nocturnal emission. One should recite the Ten Psalms immediately, on the day the emission occurred (Rabbi Nachman's *Wisdom* #141; if possible, he should first immerse in a mikvah, as above, n.7; see also *Likutey Moharan* I, 205; *ibid.* 29:4). Moreover, as seen from our text, the month of Elul itself helps to rectify this very grave sin. Thus, although many Breslover Chassidim are in the habit of reciting the Ten Psalms daily throughout the year, one should at least be careful to do so during Elul. Rabbi Nachman's *Tikkun* (Breslov Research Inst., 1984), discusses this subject in full detail.

The *Oneg Shabbat* adds: We find that on the day a circumcision is to be performed in a particular synagogue, all who pray there, as well as certain participants in the celebration even if they pray elsewhere, are exempt from reciting the supplicatory *Tachanun* prayer which follows the *Amidah* (*Orach Chaim* 131:4). He asks: When does a person recite supplications even though a circumcision takes place? When he circumcises his heart! To properly circumcise the heart, a person must pray fervently and entreat God with many, many supplications (*Oneg Shabbat*, p.272)

RUSHING TO GET TO INFINITY: AN OPEN LETTER TO MYSELF¹

DOV BEN AVRAHAM²

Let me begin by saying I don't have any answers for you. With each passing day I realize that I know very little, so I can only give you questions to ponder. Hopefully, if you stop and think about these questions they will begin to help you as they have begun to help me.

Have you ever considered that one of the greatest obstacles to living your life in accordance with your true tachlis is rushing to complete something according to your personal definition of "completion", and trying to accomplish what you *imagine* Hashem expects specifically from you?

Waking up each morning, you may envision just how you would like your day to proceed and what the ideal day would look like if you were fully plugged into your true tachlis. You envision spending time in hisbodedus, davening with kavanah, saying brochos with kavanah, and completing your daily learning seder.

Yet, the world seems to be designed to thwart your every effort in this regard:

- You have a difficult time finding a quiet place or time for hisbodedus;
- Your son or daughter wants your attention when you are only up to kapitel 77 in Tikkun HaKlali.
- A pressing family matter prevents you from going to minyan.
- The door to the mikvah is locked and the sign on the door says that it will be undergoing repairs for the next few days;
- Someone tries to talk to you in the midst of the Amidah;
- A co-worker comes over to chat in the midst of your "HaMotzi" or "Asher Yatzar" after you have only said the words, "*Baruch Atah Hashem...*";
- Urgent taskings in the office prevent you from taking an extra few seconds to say a brocha with kavanah before you drink a cup of coffee at your desk;
- You have to wake up early to travel somewhere (or are away from home) and have only a limited time for learning; certainly not enough to complete an amount that you would consider "acceptable";
- You cannot focus and concentrate on learning the sefer in front of you; it feels like you are doing nothing more than mindlessly reading an instruction manual in Japanese; or
- Citing the lack of frum relatives on both sides of the family, your wife does not give you permission to go to Uman for Rosh Hashanah because she doesn't want to be alone with the kids over yom tov.

I am certain that one or all of these things has happened to you at one time or another, just as they have *all* happened to me. However, I would also imagine that you would like to view these as "exceptions" and not the rule to how the average day should proceed. Each of these occurrences causes you to make a mental

¹ Note to Reader: I wrote this piece in the format of a letter to myself because I do not yet profess to have attained to ability to look at life with this perception. I need to continually strengthen myself to attempt to live in accordance the teaching upon which this letter was gleaned; Likutey Moharan I:65.

² Author of Bnei Avraham Ahuvecha: Gerim in Chassidic Thought.

detraction in the significance of the day in which you are now living. Each occurrence “proves” to you that you did not meet your mark today and forces you to come up with complicated new strategies to ensure they don’t ever occur again. Yet, it is possible that you failed to ask yourself the simple question,

“Who caused these things to happen?”

There cannot be another force in the universe independent of Hashem controlling only those occurrences which prevent you from serving Him. You may quickly dismiss this as obvious, however if you are honest with yourself, you will acknowledge that this knowledge still remains theoretical to you and has not yet penetrated your heart. You honestly still cannot truly fathom how it can be His will to prevent you from serving Him; you cannot fathom how an obstacle you encounter in your avodas Hashem is ultimately for your good and is in reality a display of His supreme kindness. In order to slowly begin to do so, you must devote a significant amount of time to hisbodedus each day.

In regards to the examples listed above, you may also may have noticed that experiencing them begins to force you to rush through performing mitzvos. They may have caused you to conclude that an interruption invalidates whatever you are occupied with; turning it into a “blemished offering”. So, you begin to speed read through the siddur or Tehillim and perhaps even start skimming through your learning. You may become more concerned with the fact that you have learned your pre-determined quota that day and less concerned that you have actually understood the material, retained it, and attempted to internalize it.

Unfortunately, this may have even caused you to start serving your own service of Hashem instead of Hashem Himself! This means that you can become preoccupied with serving Him in precisely the manner that you want to serve Him, and perhaps not according to how He wants to be served in those “less than ideal” circumstances.

It is never too late to reverse your course if you have already proceeded down this route. One technique to reverse this trend involves doing something very easy, which turns out not to be so easy in practice; taking a few seconds before doing a mitzvah and asking yourself, *“Why I am I doing this?”*

Before picking up a sefer, a piece of food to eat, or your tallis and tefillin, ask yourself this question. Force yourself to take a few seconds to honestly answer this question; over and over again throughout the day. Address your answer directly to Hashem. Don’t just speak *about* Him.

At first you may only remember to do this a handful of times during the day. Don’t let this discourage you; continue baby step after baby step. Over time, taking these few seconds will begin to help you from mindlessly going through your day and help you reestablish your connection to the One who gave you another day of life to live.

ELUL: FINDING OUR WAY

HRHG SHALOM ARUSH *SHLITA* ¹

Elul is the month of teshuva. Most people think that "teshuva" means penitence, but that's not really accurate. Teshuva means to return, from the Hebrew word *lashuv*. So where are we trying to return to? To Hashem, of course. But, so many people are lost - they don't know the way. Our job in Elul is to find our way back to Hashem. For that, we must learn spiritual navigation.

There's a basic law in navigation - you can't know where you're going until you know where you are. Most people have no idea where they are - they're lost in this world. That's why they lack direction and waste their lives doing inconsequential things.

Let's suppose that you do have a goal, that you do know where you want to go. If you don't know where you are now, how can you know how to get there. For example, suppose you want to go to Chicago, but you have no idea where you are now. If you're in Los Angeles, then you have to travel eastward to get to Chicago. And if you're in New York City, then you must travel westward to get there. So what happens if you don't know where you are? You don't know where to go!

Hashem calls each one of us every single day - *Ayeka*, where are you? The same laws in physical navigation also apply to spiritual navigation. We can't know where we're going if we don't know where we are. We can't get close to Hashem if we don't take an objective look at ourselves and know exactly where we're holding. A person can't simply say, "I know how to get to Hashem - I simply go up!" He won't get closer to Hashem unless he first does what he needs to do at his current spiritual level. A person can't wake up in the morning and decide that he's Moses or Rebbe Akiva - it doesn't work that way. Our ascent must be level by level, correcting and refining ourselves every step of the way. Just as a child can't jump from the second grade of elementary school to Harvard Medical School, we'd be fantasizing to think that we can pole-vault our way over spiritual steps to reach great heights. People who think that end up falling just like the polevaulter - he doesn't stay up high, because that's not true ascent.

Let's look where we really are now. We're influenced by a generation that's hit rock bottom. Every single day, you hear stories about how the web, social media and chat rooms have brought out the ugliest of people. Who ever heard of such blatant cyber adultery, pedophiles, and other such filth? It breaks one's heart to think that so many "observant" people squander hours in such spiritual mires, which is non other than the Evil Inclination's quicksand that traps and buries a person alive. Everything revolves around lust and breach of holiness.

You can't understand the rewards of guarding one's personal holiness, especially in a generation where even rabbis fail to guard their eyes. That's what it means to know where you are. Be honest with yourself and be honest with Hashem. Talk to Him like this: "OK, Hashem, I admit that my mind is full of lewd images and thoughts. I often forget to close my eyes and I end up seeing sights that destroy my soul, rob me of my personal holiness and are therefore hateful to You. But, I want to be a *shomer brit*, Hashem; I want to be a

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guardian of personal holiness. I want to be able to get close to you. I want to be able to taste the true delight of Torah, of Shabbat and of holiness. I'm sick of being a slave to my lusts and bodily urges. You have to help me, Hashem! You're my Father in Heaven; I need Your help because I can't do this on my own."

You can't imagine the immense gratification Hashem receives from a person who speaks to Hashem after candid self-evaluation. We shouldn't budge from this type of daily personal prayer until every aspect of personal holiness is deeply ingrained within our hearts and minds. The important thing to know is where we're truly holding. And, in all ethical honesty, we can only seek Hashem's help in enhancing our personal holiness if we're doing everything in our power to guard and preserve our personal holiness.

There's an important point which is the beginning of every success, the best way to connect to Hashem. This is the foundation of one's entire relationship with Hashem. Let me explain:

Parshat Breishit explains that Adam and Eve transgressed Hashem's commandment by eating from the Tree of Wisdom. The Torah then tells that after eating the forbidden fruit, they realized how terrible their transgression was. So what did they do? Inanely, they tried to hide from Hashem. Stop and think about this - isn't it *chutzpa*? That's really insolent, trying to hide from Hashem, Who is everywhere, all the time, omniscient and sees everything. Hashem also never forgets the tiniest detail of whatever happens anywhere. How can you hide from Hashem? Adam and Eve did.

Just imagine that your boys are playing hardball, and they knock the ball right through your \$1500 living-room window. Then they try to hide from you; that makes you even more furious. But, if your boys are good boys, and they admit their mistake, willing to pay for the damage by doing chores and paying with their allowance money and birthday money, your heart fills with mercy for them. They know they did wrong and they're willing to rectify. What wonderful boys. You don't punish such children; indeed, you love them even more.

Just imagine the grief that Adam and Eve would have spared both themselves and subsequent generations if they would have approached Hashem and admitted their mistake rather than trying to hide. So you sinned? Suffer a few moments of embarrassment and confess to Hashem! The embarrassment in itself is an atonement for the sin. But to try and hide from Hashem? That's super *chutzpa*, outright insolence. Don't you think that Hashem sees everything and knows everything? How can anyone hide from Hashem? Yet, we're not talking about Adam and Eve - we're talking about us, here 5773 years down the road. People hide behind their office door and text message to people they shouldn't be texting. Or people think they're alone at home and start gabbing in chat rooms, or Facebook, or even worse. Don't you know that Hashem sees and hears your every thought, not only your every word. Thinking that you can hide from Hashem, or that Hashem doesn't see you, is the biggest heresy and insolence on earth.

So how can a so-called religious person do the horrible things that we've been hearing about, completely trampling personal holiness? Their lust blinds them to the point where they can no longer see Hashem. When a person cuts himself off from personal holiness, he cuts himself off from Hashem, G-d forbid.

Hashem is still patient. He is still calling out daily to every one of us, "*Ayeka*, where are you?" *Ayeka*, when we take a good look at ourselves and ask ourselves where we are, this is the important point which we spoke about, the beginning of every success, and the best way to connect to Hashem. *Ayeka*, honestly assessing ourselves and knowing truly where we're holding is the foundation of one's entire relationship with Hashem. May we all succeed, amen.

A HOLE IN THE BOTTOM OF THE GARBAGE BAG

An aspiring Breslover

Likutei Moharan doesn't need my approbation, and yet I must say; torah six is a truly exquisite Torah. In truth, a lone reading does not reveal the tremendous depth hidden in the very concise language of Rebbe Nachman. In fact even after reading through some Likutei Halochas and other commentators it is possible to remain with a very superficial understanding. With all that in mind I hope to present something which was very powerful to me and yet of course remains with the category of superficial, waiting to be drawn out and developed, which in my opinion, ultimately can only be done by each individual.

The first point, which is tremendously profound, is found within six words (in the original loshon hakodesh, but of course with translation English makes it a little "wordier"):

BECAUSE "KESER" IS "WAITING". (AND WAITING) IS AN ASPECT OF TESHUVA.

These words contain tremendous encouragement, tremendous depth and in truth, their simplicity is their profoundness.

We see from this Torah that the Rebbe is coming to teach us the depth of teshuva and how to attain real teshuva. We can all follow the steps of teshuva as explained in Jewish law and we should do this regularly and without doubt we do achieve teshuva in this way. However, the Rebbe is showing us that teshuva is an on-going process, an organic process of self-growth and development and this requires the concept of waiting.

Waiting means – you're going to get there, you have to keep going forward, but it's going to take time.¹ The crude moshul is; no one sets off on foot from Yerushalyim to Tzfas and expects to be there in fifteen minutes.

¹ I once saw a beautiful vort from Rav Y.M. Morgenstern Shlita, where he brings Reb Noson on this point as follows:

"הַיּוֹם כָּחֵם, הָאֵלֶּה לְפֶתַח יֹשֵׁב וְהוּא, מִמְּרָא בְּאֵלֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵי יִירָא." "And Hashem appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre, as he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day."

Reb Nosson of Breslov explains on the phrase, "As he sat in the tent door," that "sitting" indicates waiting and delay.

Every person must spend a great deal of time sitting and waiting at the entry to holiness. Even if one finds that he is not being blessed to see the fruits of his labor or realize his aspiration, nevertheless he must sit and wait at the entry of holiness. And he must do so even if the heat is oppressive—even if the yetzer horah is fierce in its attacks upon him. There are those who fall away when the yetzer horah ranges itself against them when they are on the verge of the entry to holiness, after they have already come close in some degree to the tzaddik. At that point, it is very nearly in their hands to pray and learn properly, but at the very last moment the sitra achra overwhelms them when they are about to enter into holiness.

Avraham Avinu, however, was obstinate and remained at the door of the tent, and it was because of this that Hashem appeared to him.

Therefore after we make teshuva and find ourselves once again in a bad place, once again entertaining negative thoughts, even, G-d forbid, indulging in that which is forbidden to us, G-d forbid, we must be patient with ourselves; we must wait for ourselves to grow, to change, and to come closer to HaShem. We mustn't expect instant change, instant levels of great holiness. We must wait to become fitting for that level of spiritual work and holiness that we desire.

Every day a Jew has the opportunity for growth and with growth comes a new understanding of ourselves, of the world around us and of G-d. Every day used properly means our relationship with G-d changes and we understand in a new way what G-d wants from us and our purpose down here in this ever confusing world.

With each new day and each new understanding we can see where we have gone wrong in the past and make teshuva with a new outlook, and with a new hope for the future.

In the end HaShem will come and finish everything for us – we must keep moving forward, in this aspect of “waiting” – i.e. waiting for the true salvation on a personal and global level.

Rav Elazar Morderchai Kenig Shlita once told me: “Ask HaShem, in all simplicity, *“Make me good HaShem, help me to be better, help me to improve my character traits”*, then keep doing what you're doing, keep moving forward, and wait for HaShem to help. You're not expected to finish, only to start, don't become overwhelmed.”

These words contain so much depth and yet to many look like the simplest of words.

For example, have you ever come to the erev Shabbos mikveh thinking, “Wow another week where I lost my cool with my wife, didn't learn enough, wasted time and all the rest of it”? I think every week I have this thought – especially with the erev-shabbos-yiddisher-shteib situation we normally find ourselves in on Fridays! Yet then I think – OK, another mikveh, another Shabbos kodesh, I am going to keep at it! And I truly believe this is what HaShem wants from us – keep trying, keep waiting and HaShem does and will and **is** completing the work for us all the time.

Teshuva is on-going, it is not the case that one will make teshuva and wake up the tzadik of the generation. But one may very well make teshuva, feel nothing different, but actually be that much closer to HaShem and that much closer to one's personal redemption.

Imagine what Reb Noson went through in his life! We could never withstand such trials, but Reb Noson waited and waited and he saw that HaShem came and completed everything for him! Our entire spiritual lives today and the Breslov heritage we hold in our hands is all in the merit of Reb Nosons perseverance and waiting!²

Another tremendous and beautiful section of this Torah is as follows:

THE MAIN ASPECT OF TESHUVAH IS TO HEAR ONESELF BEING SHAMED, AND REMAIN SILENT.

This concept is linked to the idea of fleeing from glory and honour and of being humble.

² This lesson is illustrated so beautifully in Chaim Kramer's *Through Fire and Water*. Every page you turn is an example of how Reb Noson was **the** expert in this concept of waiting.

Yet I ask (and be honest!), how many of us read this line and thought *“Ok, so next time some slaps me in the face and calls me a fool, I will stand there and take it, not even that I will lap it up! I will thank HaShem there and then for this great opportunity”*.

What happens next? We close the book and sit waiting for this tremendous opportunity to come, even picturing it in our imagination. It doesn't come right away, so in the mean time we take the rubbish out, and in our haste we don't notice the small hole in the bag which drips a foul smelling liquid across the entire house and outside to the street.

On our return, feeling pretty much like the big tzadik for taking out the rubbish without having been asked, the wife screams *“Don't take the garbage (if you married an American) again! You make more mess for me! Look at this trail you left! And it stinks! Disgusting”*.

Now we all know that this is actually a great opportunity to live the Rebbe's words! To fulfil Torah Six of Likutei Moharan, HaShem has given us the chance right now! And yet, hold on a minute!! This is not fair!! We didn't picture it this way – we saw someone on the bus slapping us in the face and ripping us apart and in front of half of Yerushalyim we would just take it, sit down smiling, perhaps even whip out a sefer tehilim and, in front of everyone, enter some deep state of devikus. In fact we feel a little cheated – it's just me and the wife here right now! Who's going to see me fulfil the words of Rebbe Nachman! Who's going to see me live Likutei Moharan.

I need say no more.

In short I am learning to learn Likutei Moharan and apply it to the actual level I am on as opposed to the level I really wish I was on!

This simple occurrence could actually be a way to come closer to teshuva – this simple and common occurrence! No great mystical moment! Nothing flashy or fancy! This simple daily encounter could help me fulfil the words of Rebbe Nachman, to hear myself being shamed, remain silent, apologise to the wife, thank HaShem for this opportunity and thus come closer to true teshuva, flee from honour and enhance my entire spiritual standing!

And so why do I hear my voice calling back *“So take it out yourself next time!!”*?

Answer: Back to the forest, back to the fields, keep moving forward, talk it over with HaShem and.... keep **“waiting”**....

TESHUVA AND DESIRE ¹

HRHG ELAZAR MORDERCHAI KENIG SHLITA

The Baal Shem Tov greatly praised the spiritual level of his daughter, Udel², since all day long, her heart was directed Above - her only yearning and desire was to please G-d. Every Jew should seek to attain this high level, that his or her heart be constantly directed toward G-d in order to please Him.

The foundation of our Divine service is ratzon/desire. Our ratzon/desire to come close to G-d and to please Him should always be strong. It may be the case that in general we desire to do what G-d asks of us and yet one should know that not all desires are equal. In a matter of a few minutes, we may experience tremendous differences and distinctions in our ratzon/desire. Nonetheless, the guiding principle is constantly to desire and yearn for G-d.

Reb Noson says that it is impossible to describe in writing the greatness of our ratzon and yearning to do the Will of G-d. He explains that the entire reason the soul is compelled to descend from the upper worlds into this physical world is only for the sake of ratzon. Only here can we merit to attain complete and perfect desire for HaShem and His Torah.

G-d wants the Jewish people to receive the true complete good. Since the ultimate good is to attain the level of perfect ratzon, the soul must be coerced to come here in order to attain a strong desire for G-d. The farther away from the object of love, the greater one's desire. For example, while a son is with his father, even though his love is very strong, we cannot say that he desires and yearns for his father, since he is right next to him. But when the son travels away from his father, then he begins to miss him. The farther away the son is from his father, the stronger his yearning and desire. This is why the soul must leave her elevated place to enter this material world. It is only here, in a world of free choice, that the soul may achieve completion and perfection of ratzon/desire of HaShem. When we overcome the spiritual distance and arouse our inner desire for serving G-d, then precisely through this, we perfect our souls.

The soul, the neshama, is "hewn from beneath the Heavenly Throne." She constantly yearns for her root, and longs to be connected to her source. Reb Noson discusses at length the concept of a "soul root." He explains that the souls of the Jewish people have a uniquely exalted origin. This is the place of the Upper Will and Desire that the Zohar calls "Desire of Desires." Every Jewish soul comes from there, and ultimately every soul returns there. It all depends upon ratzon.

¹ Translated and adapted from a talk given in Tsfat, 5760/2000. Based on Likutei Halachot, Arev, Halacha 3 by Rabbi Noson Sternhartz, z"l

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² The Baal Shem Tov's daughter Udel, had a daughter Feiga who was the mother of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov. Rebbe Nachman's father was Rav Simcha Horodenka the son of Rav Nachman Horodenka, a talmid of the Baal Shem HaKodesh, for whom Rebbe Nachman was named.

MATERIAL DESIRES

There are, however, many other desires that a person confronts while living in the world. Reb Noson writes that this is all for the best, since a spark of G-dliness may be found within all profane desires, as well. When we find those Divine sparks, we elevate the profane desires in which they were hidden to the realm of the holy.

Moreover, without material desires, we would be overwhelmed by our innate desire for G-d - we wouldn't want to be here at all. The desire of the soul to return to her source is so all-consuming that existence within a body would be impossible even for a short time. Therefore, G-d created us with a need to sustain ourselves through eating and drinking. This allows the soul to exist in the body, despite its innate and intense desire for G-d. Food attracts a person: the taste, sight, and smell of food stimulate the desire to eat. If there were no pleasing smell, taste, and appearance, we would be disgusted by our food. Therefore, G-d created these characteristics.

The fallen "holy sparks" that the world contains originated in the Ratzon HaElyon, the Supernal Will of the Creator. If a person wants to use everything according to the Divine Will, then he or she will eat and drink according to the requirements of the Torah. This means eating only permitted food and making the proper blessings before and after eating. The "fallen" desire is then elevated to its holy root. Therefore, the fact that we have a desire or craving for material things is ultimately for the best, since it enables the world to exist and provides us with an opportunity to engage in acts of Divine service. This is all the Will of G-d, and a wondrous thing.

THE MITZVOS AND DESIRE

These are deep concepts that form the basis of Judaism. G-d created everything according to His Will and Desire, and there is nothing that obligates Him. The Arizal states that preceding Creation, there was only G-d's Infinite Light, called the Ohr Ein Sof. It then arose in the Divine "thought" to create the world. It is known that the souls of the Jewish people preceded the world: G-d first created their souls, and afterwards He created all the worlds for their sake³. The Ein Sof is the source of ratzon, G-d's Will and Desire, and this ratzon/desire is clothed within all of the details of Creation.

Reb Noson explains that it was out of G-d's loving-kindness, that He gave us the 613 mitzvos of the Torah. The mitzvos purposefully involve material things. The essence of every mitzvah is that it is an articulation of the Creator's Will. For example, He desired that the seventh day be the Sabbath, and that we observe the Sabbath according to the laws written in the Torah. Since the 613 mitzvos are an expression of G-d's chesed, loving-kindness, through their observance we can experience G-d's love and desire for us, His people. In this light, we can understand that the Torah and mitzvos were not given in order to make our lives burdensome. Rather, the opposite is true. We should rejoice in them, since G-d gave them to the Jewish people in order to benefit us. When we believe in G-d and fulfill His mitzvos, we can experience G-d's ratzon, as it were; then our desire to come closer to G-d will be awakened. Thus, all physical desires can be repaired and elevated to their original source.

However, because desire is clothed in physical things as well, the Other Side, the realm of unholiness, has a hold upon them. Therefore, a person needs to be very careful not to fall into selfishness and physical desire. If he does, he creates a blemish in the Ratzon D'Kedushah, Holy Desire. This is why it is important to make do with a minimum of material things in this world, in order to prevent blemishing Holy Desire. Through simplicity

³ Likutei Moharan I: 17 and I:52

and wholeheartedness, a person can fulfill G-d's Will even through physical things, by using them according to the laws of the Torah. If one acts against the Will of the Creator, G-d forbid, by utilizing the material world outside of a Torah framework, then the forces of unholiness can have a hold on the physical things. A person then can be distanced tremendously from G-d. One needs to be very careful about falling into physical desires and blemishing Holy Desire, Ratzon D'Kedushah, the spiritual place of origin for which the soul yearns.

Anger, too, flows from one's blemished desires. When we are worthy to elevate all our desires to G-d's ratzon, then we live in tranquillity, without anger or jealousy. We know that if G-d wants to give us something, He will give it; if He gives it to someone else, this, too, is His Desire. With this awareness, we can experience all of the other person's pleasure and happiness without jealousy. Hate, anger, and jealousy all come from blemished desire.

Even when one stumbles by not acting according to G-d's Desire, there is a spiritual remedy: teshuva - repentance, or return. The first step of teshuva is regret. One realizes that he would have been better off if he had not acted a certain way. He acknowledges that he really has no desire for what he did. Through teshuva, a person can repair anything.

Ratzon is always the underlying factor. Our will and desire always should be for G-d and that we should act within the framework of His Torah. Through this, we have the power to elevate all material desires to the Creator. We must greatly strengthen our fear and awe of G-d, and stay far away from anything forbidden. Every stumbling blemishes the soul tremendously and creates distance from G-d. We then may be drawn to unholy desires entirely, G-d forbid. However with ratzon/desire everything can be restored to holiness - to such an extent, our sages tell us, that our sins actually become transformed to merits. Therefore, our master, Rebbe Nachman, tells us that it is forbidden to despair. Our misdeeds originated with blemished desire and now through teshuva and increasing our desire we can actually come to an even stronger desire for G-d. The farther someone is from G-d, the more he needs to awaken his desire for Him.

This is why sometimes, G-d forbid, a person can find that he has no desire for G-d, Torah, or prayer. Since he has blemished the quality of his ratzon, he now must reawaken his ratzon and direct it towards the right thing and come to express this great desire through that which is permitted to him, and not, G-d forbid, what is forbidden to him. When a person realizes that this world amounts to nothing, he will not be drawn after worldly materialism and cravings. Then even whilst feeling very distant from HaShem, it is in this distance, a person can begin to long and yearn for G-d. Through regret and teshuva, a person has the power to repair all blemishes. And by does so he can merit to see that through the stumbling itself, he can arouse himself to an even greater level of yearning for HaShem and His Torah.

ONE'S DESIRE FOR HASHEM HAS NO LIMITS

As we said, the Baal Shem Tov praised the spiritual level of his daughter Udel because her only desire was to please G-d. Likewise, it is vital to continually awaken and strengthen our own desire to do the will of the Creator. The truth is that everyone wants this, but in reality, one person cannot do everything. Sometimes one is prevented from doing a mitzvah or good deed because of various circumstances, even if he is actually capable of doing it. However, there is no limit to how much one's desire can be awakened. For example, with tzedakah, how much can one person give? We can only give according to our ability. However, even if we don't have what to give, we can use our strong desire to arouse others to give. Our Sages say, "Greater is the person who helps others to give than the one who gives," since this shows the strength of his desire to give. Who can prevent someone from desiring or thinking that if all the world's silver and gold were his, he would give it to the Creator? A person can desire without limitation. Of course, since we live in a world of boundaries, we need

to be very careful about how intense desire is channelled. Nonetheless, it is crucial that every single person knows that desire for G-d is the ultimate perfection and completion of a human being.

There are people who waste their lives for the sake of physical desires, but the Jewish people know that there is a Creator. We need to ensure that our entire desire is only for G-d. King David says in the book of Psalms, "My soul yearns, indeed it pines, for the courtyards of G-d" (Psalms 84:3). He wants G-d without limit – he yearns to give up his soul to G-d. He also says, "My soul thirsts for You, my flesh longs for You" (Psalms 63:2). A person's soul can yearn for G-d without limit. Coming to this level of desire for G-d is the completion of Man.

Practically, there are a number of ways a person can work to attain proper desire. Foremost is the observance of the Torah, since desire is articulated through the mitzvos we perform. There is also the idea of expressing desire through song, which is the essence of the Book of Psalms. Then there is prayer and hisbodedus as a vehicle to express one's desire and yearning to do G-d's Will. Hisbodedus is speaking to G-d in simple terms in our own native language, pouring out our hearts to Him.

May G-d grant us understanding to see the richness of life in this world. May we be genuinely happy, without pressure or anger. If anger surfaces with all its accompanying difficulties, we must put ourselves aside and strengthen our faith in the fact that everything in the world comes from the Creator and know we may need to do this many times. Again and again we must put ourselves aside and reinforce, there is a Creator who governs every detail according to His will and desire. The root of this desire is contained in the 613 mitzvos. Our main task in the world is to perform the mitzvos that G-d gave in His desire for us.

ASERES YEMEI TESHUVAH – A TIME TO REPENT ¹

HRHG AVRAHAM TZVI KLUGER SHLITA

VIDUI, CONFESSION OF SIN, IS A SPECIAL POWER HASHEM GAVE US THAT ENABLES US TO REVEAL HIDDEN PARTS OF OURSELVES THAT EVEN WE WERE UNAWARE OF.

TESHUVAH FROM WITHIN

The Rambam writes in Hilchos Teshuvah: "Although repentance and crying out to Hashem are always worthy, in the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur they are especially worthy and are immediately accepted, as it is written, 'Seek Hashem while He can be found, call Him when He is near'" (2:6).

"And what is repentance? That the sinner should abandon his sin and remove it from his thoughts and resolve in his heart never to do it again, as it is written, 'The evil one shall abandon his way and the wicked man his thoughts.' He should also regret the past, as it is written, 'After I returned, I regretted...' and He Who Knows the hidden will testify concerning him that he will never return to this sin again, and he must verbally confess and say these things that he resolved in his heart." (2:2)

Every year during Elul and the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, we try our best to do teshuvah, to improve in areas in which we are deficient and undertake to do better the next year. Yet often, after the year has passed, we find ourselves in the same place, trying to correct the same issues we'd dealt with the previous year.

We wonder, "Where did all my resolutions go? What happened with my sincere teshuvah?" Why doesn't our teshuvah work as the Rambam stipulates, that Hashem could testify that the person would never repeat his sin again? True repentance is the rectification of the root of sin. It is tackling the underlying problem, the thoughts and emotions that caused the sin, as it is written, "The evil one shall abandon his **way** and the wicked one his **thoughts**, and he shall return to Hashem, and He shall have mercy on him." We must correct the faulty mind-set that led us to sin, as the Rambam says, "The sinner should abandon his sin and **remove it from his thoughts**." It is written, "Let us search our ways and examine them, and return till Hashem" – we must search in the depths of our hearts for the inner cause of our sin.

Aside from the actual transgression involved in a sin, R"l, it is also a result, an external symptom indicating something faulty inside a person. Undertaking to improve one's behaviour without addressing the underlying cause of that behaviour is like a sick person taking a painkiller instead of healing the illness itself. When we improve only our external deeds, we remain with the same inclinations and challenges, and simply try to battle them, but since nothing has really changed, we are liable to fall into the same trap again. What we need to change is our general attitude and perspective in life; we must strengthen our hashkafah and emunah. The change may be small, but it will be intrinsic and deep-rooted, and Hashem, "Who Knows the hidden," will be

¹ This is an English translation of the chapter Aseres Yemei Teshuvah from the sefer Oscha Avakeish - taken from the shiurim of Harav Avraham Tzvi Kluger, shlit"a. The Hebrew sefer was published by Mechon Pe'er Yisrael, Beis Hamidrash Nezer Yisrael, Beis Shemesh.

able to testify that we will not return to that sin again. The Rambam is not talking about Hashem foreseeing our future behaviour; rather, he is defining to us what our repentance should be like. He is teaching us what would be clearly evident and verifiable at the time of true repentance. Hashem alone knows what is inside our minds and hearts, and can attest that we have undergone an internal change – a change of the mind and heart – and that our challenges are now at a different level than before.

Internal change is not so obvious on the surface, but it is real and fundamental, turning us into different people altogether. The Rambam writes that one who repents "changes his name, as if to say, 'I am someone else; I am not the same person that did those deeds'" (ibid 2:4). A person's name reveals his essence.

To repent means to change one's inner essence. This will consequently effect an external change which may be less drastic, but more stable and enduring.

RETURNING TO OUR TRUE GOAL

What is the root of sin? How can we identify it and correct it? *Cheit*, sin, is from the same root as the word *hechti*, as in, "*hechti es hamatarah*" – missed the target. The general root cause of all sin is that a person forgets his true purpose in life and makes his own desires his purpose. The Rambam writes, "*Although the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is a Torah commandment, it also contains an allusion: 'Wake up, sleepers, from your sleep, and arise, slumberers, from your slumber; and search your deeds, and repent, and remember your Creator! Those who forget the truth in the passing fancies and err all year with vanities and emptiness that neither help nor save...'*" (ibid. 3:4)

The cause of sin is that a person forgets the purpose of his creation and becomes caught up in the trivialities of this world, abandoning the ultimate goal of revealing *kevod Shamayim*. Thus, the primary aspect of repentance is to remember Hashem and establish one, distinct goal in life: to reveal Hashem's glory.

A Jew is a *chelek Eloka mima'al*, intrinsically bound up with Hashem, whose true desire is to do Hashem's will, but this innate desire is sometimes concealed and forgotten about. Teshuvah – returning – means returning to our original, natural state of longing for Hashem, returning to our true and natural direction in life, with the clear and definite goal of *kevod Shamayim*.

CONFESSION

Once we repent on a general level by understanding and establishing our purpose in life, we can try to identify the specific root that brought about a particular sin. We want to pinpoint the subtle flaw that is encumbering our relationship with the Ribono shel Olam. Hashem gave us the mitzvah of confession – "*And they shall confess their sin that they have committed*" (Naso 5:7 This mitzvah helps us uncover hidden root causes. *Vidui*, confession, is from the root of the word *hoda'ah*, admission. The concept "admission" only applies to something indefinite, something concealed that a person could deny and yet he admits and reveals the truth. Similarly, confession applies particularly to concealed truths. Confession is a power granted to us by Hashem that enables us to reveal hidden parts of ourselves that even we are unaware of.

In *Parshas Bereishis*, we read about the creation of man: "*Hashem formed man of dust from the earth and He blew into his nostrils a soul of life, and man became a living soul*" (2:7). Onkelus translates *a living soul* as a "*speaking spirit*." The union of the body, which is "dust from the earth", and the soul, which is spiritual, makes man a "living spirit," i.e. it gives him the power of speech. The power of speech connects the body and soul.

Speech has the power to reveal secreted parts of the soul and bring them to the body's awareness. It is written in *Shir Hashirim*, "My soul went out as he spoke" (5:6); speech has the power to arouse and reveal the soul.

As part of the teshuvah process, we are required to confess and express our repentance in words so that it emanates from the soul into our practical lives; the internal change should become something distinct and tangible that we could indeed put into practice. As we said, there is also a deeper kind of confession, the inner implication of this mitzvah. We can use the power of speech to reveal hidden roots in our soul. Our holy *sefarim* extol the importance of intimate and natural conversation with Hashem, in the manner one talks to a friend. With time, a Jew learns to discern Hashem's messages and answers in the form of thoughts that surface in his mind, thus enabling him to conduct a "conversation" with the Ribono shel Olam

We need to become accustomed to expressing ourselves naturally and openly to Hashem, even for a few short moments, on a regular, everyday basis and gradually develop a natural, open relationship with the Ribono shel Olam. Then we will be able, through conversation with Hashem, to unseal the depths of our soul together with Hashem and detect the subtle deviation that caused a certain sin, "*and they shall confess their sin that they committed.*"

Through this intimate conversation and close connection with Hashem, we will be able to discover deficiencies that we couldn't have identified on our own. Unwittingly, people tend to fool themselves, as they are afraid to face their shortcomings. Acknowledgement of one's true situation could lead a person to despair, for he would think he is undesirable to Hashem in this way, *chas veshalom*. That's why he will try to evade it. But when we maintain a close, regular relationship with Hashem, His closeness and love becomes so clear and tangible to us that even when we become aware of our most severe weaknesses, it is still evident to us that Hashem is with us, that He always wants us and that He is only waiting for us to repent. We know and feel that Hashem, Who created us and gives us life, understands us better than anyone else ever can and that He is eager for us to return to Him, as the *pasuk* tells us, "*For You do not desire the death of one who deserves death, but that he repent from his way and live. Until the day of his death You wait for him; if he returns You will immediately accept him.*"

We love Hashem so deeply and so desire His closeness, that no matter how difficult it may be for us to face our deep-rooted failings, we still feel happy to have uncover and remove the barriers that come between us.

It is difficult to bring examples of an intimate and honest confession to Hashem, as it is extremely individual and varies from person to person, but we will nevertheless provide some examples to help us understand the idea and connect to it. Obviously, it will be necessary to make some adjustments to suit your personal circumstances, feelings, and tendencies.

Let us take the example of a woman who is habitually late for candlelighting on *erev Shabbos*. Somehow, she always finds herself rushing to complete last-minute chores after the siren signifying the imminent approach of Shabbos has sounded. Even if she resolves firmly to begin ushering in Shabbos on time, she will, in fact, remain with the same mindset and with the same challenge, and it is doubtful that she will be able to keep to her commitment.

The first basic step of her repentance would be to acknowledge and clarify for herself that her true foremost goal in life is to do Hashem's will and reveal His honor. This clarity and true desire will help her withstand her challenges. Her priorities have changed; her inner desire has been revealed and her external desires have become less significant. On Erev Shabbos, she will repeatedly remind herself, "Ribono shel Olam, all I want is to do Your will." This will give her the strength she needs to drop some of her expectations and greet Shabbos on time and in a relaxed frame of mind.

If she is accustomed to talking to Hashem, she can try to pinpoint the specific cause of the problem so she can solve the root of the issue. She might find a quiet moment and open up to Hashem: "Ribono shel Olam, what is really going on? Why am I always so pressured on Friday and cramming in more and more things to do?" She would pause for a moment to allow her thoughts to flow freely, and then express her thoughts: "What is really pressuring me on Friday?" After another moment of calm, she will realize, "I'm pressured because I want to make sure I am measuring up as a good and efficient *balabusta*. I do not like to admit it, but I'm not really so concerned about *kevod Shabbos*; it's more my perfectionism that drives me. I want the Shabbos meals and the house to be just so." But then she will become aware of inner thoughts that have been concealed even from herself, and she will express them in words: "Actually, I can't really say that I don't care about *kevod Shabbos*. I *do* care. There is always this little voice inside me, at the back of my mind, telling me to let go a little or I won't get to Shabbos on time again, and that Hashem doesn't want that; it's not *kevod Shabbos* at all. But I simply force myself to ignore it and I end up feeling even more pressured... oh, Hashem, I feel so ashamed!"

She may find herself in tears, but they will be tears of relief. It is not easy to unearth one's ingrained fault, but at the same time, it is a relief to finally have the problem in front of her in plain view. It's like having a load taken off her chest. She can now reframe the thoughts that were the root of the problem. She now realizes that she has to prepare for Shabbos the way Hashem wants. The following Friday, she will easily detect her pressure for perfection and be able to find within herself the true desire to do Hashem's will. She is now in a different position altogether; she has the ability to view herself like an onlooker from the outside. Now, with Hashem's help, she is able to live with the correct mind-set and embracing the right goals. He Who Knows the hidden will testify that she has truly repented.

As a second example, let us take a woman who often feels slighted by a neighbor's or sister-in-law's attempts to correct her or give her advice about her children's *chinuch* or home-related issues, and finds herself talking *lashon hara* about them. Resolving not to speak *lashon hara* will achieve little. A person who is agitated or offended has a hard time controlling himself. When she finds herself in that situation, chances are she will be unable to withstand the challenge of talking *lashon hara*. But if she regularly talks to the Ribono shel Olam in a natural fashion, she will be able to solve the root of the problem together with Him. She will express the feelings in her heart to Hashem: "Ribono shel Olam, I'm really agitated. I get so annoyed at my neighbor/sister-in-law. I don't know what's happening to me."

She will then "listen" to her thoughts and discover deeper levels inside herself: "Actually, it doesn't always bother me. It's only when she gives me advice about things that I know myself – sometimes even better than her – that I get upset, because I feel she looks down on me, underestimates my skill and understanding – and I can't take that!" Then, with help of Hashem, she will try to pinpoint the source of the problem: "I really shouldn't care so much what others think about me. You, Ribono shel Olam, know me best, and You know the truth. What do I care what my neighbor thinks about me?" With this new awareness, she will be able to change her inner reaction to her neighbor's criticism, and thus reach true repentance.

As we already said, this kind of confession is very individual. Each person will have a different style of talking, identify different root issues, and handle them differently. Through this confession, Hashem Himself, so to speak, helps each person find his inner truth.

It is a wonderful, purifying feeling to finally pin down a problem that has been hidden deep inside us. It is liberating, like draining a pus-filled blister or extracting a deep splinter. The *Tanna Dvei Eliyahu* (chapter 1) likens the situation to that of a king who is overjoyed to see the garbage his servants removed from his palace heaped near the door. A Jew, whose very essence is bound up with Hashem, houses the King of Kings. Sin contradicts his essence, sullying and distressing his pure soul. When he repents, he feels a deep inner happiness, having returned to his natural state as a dwelling place for the holy Shechinah.

BRESLOV MINHAGIM FOR THE MONTH OF ELUL¹

HRHG DOVID SEARS SHLITA

- Most Breslover Chassidim in Eretz Yisrael recite the prayers of Yom Kippur Katan every Erev Rosh Chodesh. But even those who do not observe Yom Kippur Katan every month recite the prayers on Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul and Erev Rosh Chodesh Nisan. In addition, many Breslover Chassidim travel to Meron on Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul to recite the Yom Kippur Katan prayers beside the grave of the holy Tanna, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai.
- Rebbe Nachman encouraged his followers to recite the Tikkunei Zohar as well as additional prayers and supplications during the month of Elul. It is also customary to remain in the synagogue and Beit Medrash to learn Torah later than usual at night. Rebbe Nachman said, "The niggun with which the Tikkunei Zohar is recited, and the strain and fatigue produced by staying late in the Beis Medrash, are all made into great and lofty things on high"².
- Reb Nosson praises the custom of reading the entire TaNaKH during the days of Elul and Tishrei, finishing on Hoshanah Rabbah.³
- Breslover Chassidim recite Psalm 27 (LeDovid HaShem Ori) immediately after Tachanun, or after Shemoneh Esreh when there is no Tachanun, prior to Kaddish. This seems to have been a regional custom, which is also observed by the Chassidim of Chernobyl/Skver.⁴
- Reb Noson darshans on the common custom to sound the Shofar every day at the end of Shacharit from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Erev Rosh Hashanah.⁵

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² Sichos haRan 294

³ See Otzar haYirah, Teshuvos haShanah, Elul.

However, not everyone can do this. Once, while recovering from surgery, Rabbi Elazar Kenig mentioned that he hoped to complete the Rebbe's Sippurei Ma'asiyos before Rosh Hashanah. This is an example of how we must adjust our goals to our abilities and circumstances at every stage of life, and how more modest avodahs are also meaningful.

⁴ As to the source of this minhag in general, Mateh Ephraim cites Midrash Shocher Tov, 27, that "ori[my light]" alludes to Rosh Hashanah, "yishi [my salvation]" alludes to Yom Kippur, and "ki yitzpineni bi'sukkah [For He will hide me in His shelter]" alludes to Sukkot. However, the minhag of reciting Psalm 27 daily during these weeks seems to have originated during the late 17th century; see Rabbi Nochum Greenwald, "Yachsam shel Gedolei haChassidus le Sefer Chemdas Yamim," Kovetz Heichal haBaal Shem Tov, vol. II, 2 [Brooklyn, NY 2004], p. 56. Rabbi Greenwald cites Rabbi Borukh Katz that Sefer Shem Tov haKatan [Salzburg 1705] by Rabbi Binyamin Beinisch Hakohen seems to be to be the earliest written source for this minhag.

⁵ See Likkutei Halakhos, Birkhas haRe'ah 5:18

- It is customary to recite additional Tehillim during Elul and the Ten Days of Repentance.⁶

SELICHOT

- Selichot for Ashkenazim follow the Polish minhag. As the Shulchan Arukh stipulates, they are recited on the days prior to Rosh Hashanah, and throughout the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah until Erev Yom Kippur. Sefardim begin reciting selichot immediately after Rosh Chodesh Elul.⁷
- In the passages that begin E-I Melekh yoshev... the nusach of the ARI zal is say u'mitnaheg bachassidut, adding the connecting letter vav, rather than "mitnaheg," as in most printed texts. When asked about this custom, Rabbi Elazar Kenig replied, "It is not a difficult thing to do, and it does not require a kabbalistic kavanah [which might be beyond the ken of the average person] – so why not do it?" His answer reflects a general rule regarding the ARI zal's customs.⁸
- The ARI zal recited vidui only once during selichot (although he did not omit the paragraphs between the other two repetitions of vidui), while the more common minhag is to recite it three times. Rabbi Elazar Kenig remarked that most Breslovers probably follow the common minhag, adding "and for some of us, that's still not enough!" He explained that each time we recite the vidui, we should do so with greater sincerity.⁹

KHOF ELUL

- The twentieth of Elul is the Yahrtzeit of Rabbi Avraham Sternhartz (1862-1955), grandson of the Tcheriner Rav, great-grandson of Reb Noson, and teacher of numerous Breslover Gedolim. An orphan, Reb Avraham was raised by the Tcheriner Rov, and during his youth met all of the living talmidim of Reb Noson, including Reb Moshe Breslover. He was Baal Mussaf and Baal Tokei'a for many decades in Uman, and served as Rav of Kremenchug until he escaped the U.S.S.R. at the height of the Stalinist purges, arriving in Yerushalayim in 1936. Reb Avraham immediately became a key figure in the Yerushalayim community, attracting many talmidim, and soon established the Rosh Hashanah kibbutz

⁶ Likkutei Moharan II, 73. According to the mesorah of Chabad/Lubavitch, this also was the custom of the Baal Shem Tov, who would recite three chapters a day until Yom Kippur, when he would finish the rest of Tehillim; cf. Sefer Minhagim–Chabad, Elul, p. 54 ff. citing Kovetz Mikhtavim leTehillim, p. 207. Matteh Ephraim 581:8 cites the widespread custom of reciting ten chapters per day beginning on Rosh Chodesh Elul, so that one completes Sefer Tehillim twice before Rosh Hashanah, and one more time during the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah; similarly Rabbi Chaim Elazar Spira of Munkatch, Darkhei Chaim viShalom, Chodesh Elul, 687

⁷ Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chaim 581:1. Reb Noson mentions this custom in Likkutei Halakhos, Devarim Haba'im beSeudah 4:3; Matanah 5:20

⁸ See Rabbi Chaim Vital, Pri Etz Chaim, Sha'ar haSelichos 8, citing Zohar III, 228a, and Tikkunei Zohar, Hakdamah, 11c. Cf. Siddur ARI Rav Shabbsai; Likkutei MaHaRiCH III, p. 601; Sefer Minhagim–Chabad, et al

⁹ For the custom of the ARI, see Rabbi Chaim Vital, Pri Etz Chaim, Sha'ar haSelichot 8 [end]; similarly the GRA, cited in Sha'arei Rachamim; Rabbi Chaim Elazar Spira of Munkatch, Darkhei Chaim viShalom, Chodesh Elul, 703; Sefer Minhagim–Chabad, et al. Re. the threefold recitation of vidui, see Likkutei MaHaRiCH III, p. 602, citing the Baal haRokeach, Minhagim, and Levush; also see the Butchatcher Rov, Eishel Avraham, Orach Chaim 581

in Meron. After his histalkut in 1955, his disciple, Rabbi Gedalia Kenig devoted himself to carrying on his revered teacher's legacy.

In Eretz Yisrael, se'udot are held in Reb Avraham's honor on the evening of Khof Elul. During the afternoon, many Breslover Chassidim travel to the Har Menuchet Cemetery in Yerushalayim to recite Tehillim and pray beside Reb Avraham's kever. Outside of Israel, many Breslover Chassidim also light a candle, give tzedakah, share a se'udoh in his honor, and learn some of his teachings from Tovot Zichronot, etc.

After Reb Avraham passed away, Rabbi Gedaliah Kenig published his teacher's Tovot Zichronot, Breslover teachings related to the first ten lessons in Likkutei Moharan, together with the Tcheriner Rov's Yerach haEisanim, chiddushim on Likkutei Moharan related to Rosh Hashanah, and Reb Avraham's Imrot Tehorot on the importance of traveling to tzaddikim, particularly Rabbi Nachman, for Rosh Hashanah. Some of Reb Avraham's letters were published by Reb Noson Zvi Kenig of Bnei Brak as Rinat Tzion. A scholarly biography of Reb Avraham is being prepared for publication in the near future by Rabbi Nachman Burshteyn of Jerusalem.