

The Fifth Pillar: Teshuvah

written by Yossi Katz | January 7, 2014

V. Fifth Pillar: Teshuvah

The fifth fundamental principle is to know that every time you are spiritually uplifted and thoughts of Teshuvah begin to stir in you, if you then think that “from now on I will certainly be a good Jew, I will certainly do such and such”, any thought of this kind contains an admixture of the atheistic attitude that things are in “my power and the strength of my hand”. Such a thought will inevitably bring depression in its wake and push you away from God again later on, because you think things are in your control – that the kingship is yours.[\[1\]](#)

Does it make a person worthy of coming closer to God just because of one good thought they had, a thought that in any case came to them through the “arousal from above”? If they think they are going to make themselves stay close to God in the future, doesn't that mean they have to take responsibility for having been so far away until now? Such an attitude is indicative of a lack of knowledge and understanding. If someone has been far from their spiritual goal until now, it is because Heaven held them back for not having prayed properly.[\[2\]](#) And in the future too, without God's favor it will be impossible for them to stand up when the time comes for them to be tested.

The only thing we can do is to take it on ourselves to try to do good and ask God not to distance us – at least not from prayer and supplication. We must ask God that no matter what may happen to us we should always immediately remember that the main thing to do is to pray. Prayer is founded on the supreme heights of holiness,[\[3\]](#) to reveal that everything is in God's power and that “it is in His hand to cause all things

to grow and become strong” (II Chronicles 29:2). God says, (Exodus 33:19) “I will show favor to whom I will show favor” – i.e. to the person who asks Me to show him favor. Such a person comes to realize that there is never no hope! There is no despair at all – not in all the world! There are many ways of falling, but they all come only from God. They are sent with love and mercy in order to draw us closer, not to push us away. Above all we have to pray and pray, both before the test and afterwards, even if we stumbled, whether deliberately or unwittingly, under compulsion or willfully, as above.

[1] Thus the Sages taught that once a person has confessed a particular sin on Yom Kippur he should not confess the same sin the next Yom Kippur. However Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov taught that it is praiseworthy to repeat one’s confession as it shows a recognition of one’s past folly (Yoma 86b).

[2] Rebbe Nachman taught: “One should pray his entire life to have the merit of saying even a single word of pure, absolute truth before God” (Likutey Moharan I, 112).

[3] “These are the things that stand at the very heights of the world” (Berakhot 6b). “This refers to prayer” (Rashi, loc. Cit. s.v. Devarim).