



Returnity

The Way Back to Eternity

SELECTED TEACHINGS FROM THE
CHASSIDIC MASTERS ON TESHUVAH

Rabbi Tal Moshe Zwecker

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*Jewish Books that
Transform
Inspire
Light You on Fire*

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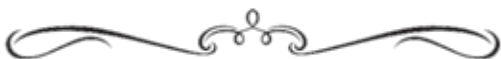
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In memory of our grandparents

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ר' דוד בן בצלאל ז"ל
מרת הינדא בת משה לייב ע"ה
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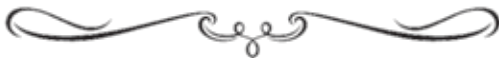
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You are the link to our *mesorah*, and your *mesiras nefesh* brought forth many generations of Torah-observant Jews who understand the significance of what it means to be a Yid. We are proud to be your grandchildren, and we hope to bring you *nachas* in all that we might accomplish in our lives.

Yael and Pinny Farkas

and their children,

Moshe Simcha, Miriam, and Shalom Dovid



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The holy Rav Menachem Nachum Chernobler, author of Me'or Einayim, once said that he firmly believes, with complete faith, that any awakening to do teshuvah that exists in the world until Mashiach arrives (speedily, amen) flows from one source: the great awakening of the holy prayers of the Ba'al Shem Tov, may his merit shield and protect us.

—ILANA D'CHAYI, VA'ESCHANAN; OHR HANER

INTRODUCTION

In Judaism, we call the process of rebuilding a shattered soul “*teshuvah*” — repentance. By this we mean that the soul has found its way back to Hashem.

In reality, we never really left Him, but the sins we did, the mistakes we repeat, create a barrier between us. They prevent us from feeling close to Him and loved by Him. They make us feel estranged, stained, unclean. The process of *teshuvah* is like a dip in the waters of our tears. Like a refreshing, cleansing rinse that washes away the stains of our actions.

Teshuvah not only washes away sin, so that our true colors — our abilities and talents — can shine through, it also brightens them. My Rebbe, the Clevelander Rebbe, *shlita*, of Raanana, heard the following parable from his older brother, *zt”l*, that illustrates this well:

If someone finds a white tablecloth in the mud, he must wash it before he can even recognize that it is a tablecloth. Then he can go over it and clean each individual stain separately.

So, too, the *neshamah* is like a beautiful white cloth. If one sins, it is as if the cloth has fallen in the mud and become unrecognizable. Only after it is washed does one even see that it is a Jewish soul. Once the soul has become washed, then Hashem becomes exacting, going over each individual transgression to get out each spot.

As you will learn in this book, *teshuvah* was created before this

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world existed; it transcends time. Therefore, the way back to Hashem leads to a place beyond time, where our past mistakes have been rectified and our future selves actualized. It is the way back to eternity.

In this book you won't find practical laws on how to return; many books have already been written on the steps to *teshuvah* and how to achieve them. Rather, the purpose of this book is to enlighten.

The old path of *teshuvah* was lined with practices: intense fasting, self-mortification, and affliction. That dark labyrinth led many into despair and depression. Many gave up and could not continue. *Teshuvah* seemed impossible to achieve. Then came the chassidic masters who shined a new light on the path of *teshuvah*. They lay down new signposts along the familiar route leading us back to Hashem. Rather than fasting, they advocated *teshuvah* in joy. Rather than self-mortification, they recommended self-love and yearning. Words and ideas that were once foreign to *teshuvah* are today synonymous with it. It is their ideas that I am sharing with you here.

Teshuvah is also like a furnace: it not only draws out our impurities, but it hardens and strengthens us, like the strongest steel, transforming us into something stronger and new. Those who master it merit the title “*ba'alei teshuvah*” — masters of return.

This book was written to help us all become Masters of Return.

TEACHINGS *of the* BA'AL SHEM TOV
RAV YISRAEL BEN ELIÉZER, KNOWN TO CHASSIDIM AS THE
"HOLY BA'AL SHEM TOV," THE FOUNDER AND LEADER OF
THE CHASSIDIC MOVEMENT

SPARKS OF TESHUVAH

During Creation, taught the holy Baal Shem Tov, when there was a shattering of the vessels (that is, when the *sefiros*, the divine attributes, which are compared to vessels, had been created to channel the light of the Infinite One into the world, but they could not contain the light and so "shattered"), sparks of divine light were scattered and dispersed all over the world. These holy sparks are found everywhere and in everything, even in such mundane things as trees and stones, even in our actions and deeds — and even in our sins and transgressions. Our mission in this world is to release these holy sparks by performing the will of the Almighty using those mundane, physical things.

What are the sparks found in a transgression — and how can they be elevated? They are the sparks of *teshuvah*, repentance. When a person repents of his transgressions, he elevates those sparks to the highest spiritual realms on High.

This is the deeper meaning of "*Nosei avon* — Forgiver of sin" (*Shemos* 34:7), which literally means "Carries up sin." Through repentance, the sin is elevated and refined. Similarly, this is what Kayin meant when he complained, "My sin is too great to 'carry up'" (*Bereishis* 4:13) — he felt

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he was unable to elevate it to the upper realms above with true repentance. TZAVAS HARIVASH

MASTERS OF RETURN

Two types of Tzaddikim are hinted at in the verse “A Tzaddik will blossom like a date palm and grow tall as a cedar” (*Tehillim* 92:13). Our Sages noted (*Taanis* 25b) that the date palm is a fruit-bearing tree, whereas the cedar does not produce fruits. So, too, there are righteous people who are involved in bearing fruit — in influencing others to do *teshuvah* and helping to produce more Tzaddikim in this world — and there are Tzaddikim who are more focused on *deveikus*, on attaching themselves to Hashem, but they are not engaged in influencing others.

With this idea, we can shed a different light on our Sages’ teaching that “in the place where *ba’alei teshuvah* stand, even the righteous cannot stand” (*Berachos* 34b). Usually *ba’al teshuvah* is interpreted to mean “penitent.” But we can also say that a Tzaddik can be known as a “*ba’al teshuvah*” — a master of return. Such a Tzaddik is one who has turned many away from sin and returned them to the path of Hashem. It is because of this Tzaddik that there is *teshuvah* in the world. His reward is many times greater than that of the other kind of Tzaddik, who, righteous as he is, does not seek to “bear fruit” and guide others onto the path of *teshuvah*. TZAVAS HARIVASH

A LOST OPPORTUNITY

There is no one in this world, not even the most lowly and wicked, who does not at some time experience pangs of remorse.

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Those who cast these thoughts aside instead of seizing the opportunity to repent are like someone who takes the keys to the king's treasury that the king himself handed him as a gift and throws them away. He is throwing away the opportunity Hashem gave him for *teshuvah*. KESSER SHEM TOV

THE FOUR MINISTERS WHO STOLE THE KING'S RICHES

A parable by the Baal Shem Tov:

There was once a king who appointed four ministers over the royal treasury. Too greedy to control their desire for all that fabulous wealth, they each stole from the treasury and fled.

The first minister was soon seized by feelings of remorse and returned on his own.

The second minister, too, began to rethink what he had done. He sought out the counsel of a wise man who spoke to his heart, saying, "What have you done and why?" The wise man convinced the minister to give back the treasure he had taken, and the second minister, too, returned.

The third minister came across a thief who was sentenced and punished harshly for his act of robbery. Witnessing the thief's punishment, he was seized with great fear — what would happen to him if he, too, were caught? His fear compelled him to return.

The fourth minister fled and never returned.

The king confronted the ministers who had come back. The minister who returned of his own volition was rewarded for his loyalty and sincerity with even greater wealth than he had taken.

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To the second minister the king gave nothing. “If you had never found the counsel of the wise man, you would have never come back,” he admonished.

Finally, the third minister, who had returned out of fear after seeing the harsh punishment that thieves suffered, the king appointed to oversee all the sentences meted out to sinners, so that he would continually witness their sufferings.

“And that minister,” concluded the Baal Shem Tov, “is I.” KESSER SHEM TOV

THE BA’AL TESHUVAH’S PRAYERS AND THE BA’AL SHEM TOV

Once, the holy Baal Shem Tov prayed *Minchah* much later than usual. When he concluded his prayers, he turned to those assembled and explained his puzzling behavior.

“There was a *baal teshuvah* who committed the worst sins in the world until he had come to transgress almost the entire Torah! Now he has repented, and today he prayed a sincere *Minchah* from the very recesses of his heart. His prayers were so heartfelt that he broke through all the gates of prayer in the heavens on High. I prayed at the same time that he prayed, trying to elevate my own prayers to join his so that they would rise to the heavens together. That was why I prayed so late today.” YECHI REUVEN, CHAGIGAH

PEEKING THROUGH THE CRACKS

The holy Baal Shem Tov taught regarding the verse “He gazes through the windows and peeks through the cracks” (*Shir*

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HaShirim 2:9) that Hashem is always peeking at us through the cracks. Even when someone wishes to commit a sin, Heaven forbid, and he hides, worried that at any moment someone might see him, that at any moment someone might catch him in the act — Hashem is watching.

In truth, this feeling that he is being watched comes from Hashem, whose supernal fear has constricted itself and is peeking at that person, peering through the cracks at him, to prevent him from sinning. It tries to stop him from committing the transgression by causing him to fear that someone is watching (as indeed Someone is). ME'OR EINAYIM, BEREISHIS

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV YAAKOV YOSEF *of* POLNOY

THE PRIMARY DISCIPLE OF THE HOLY BA'AL SHEM TOV
AND THE AUTHOR OF THE FIRST CHASSIDIC *SEFER* EVER
PRINTED — *TOLDOS YAAKOV YOSEF*

THE HEAVENLY VOICE

The Mishnah in *Avos* (6:2) tells us of a heavenly voice called a “*bas kol*,” which calls out to us on a daily basis to repent and return to Hashem. The Toldos Yaakov Yosef writes that his master and teacher, the Ba’al Shem Tov, asked, “What point is there in a daily heavenly voice that no one hears?!”

He answered that on High, where the heavenly voice originates, there are no words and there is no speech; there is only the spiritu-

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al realm known as “*Olam HaMachshavah*” — the universe of pure thought. Therefore, any thoughts a person has of repentance, any urges to return to Hashem and His path, those thoughts and feelings are not his own. Rather, that is the sound of the heavenly voice. Through our thoughts of repentance, we do truly hear the *bas kol*. KESSER SHEM TOV

AGAINST EXCESSIVE FASTING

Quoting from a letter that the Baal Shem Tov had written to him, Rav Yaakov Yosef wrote, “Do not overly engage in fasts and self-mortification. Such practices lead to depression or anger. But the reason you should especially refrain from these practices is because, rather than improving your *avodah*, they prevent you from studying Torah and serving Hashem properly.” BEN PORAS YOSEF

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV PINCHAS *of* KORITZ

ONE OF THE PRIMARY DISCIPLES OF THE
HOLY BA'AL SHEM TOV AND THE AUTHOR OF *IMREI PINCHAS*

THE ONLY TRUE TESHUVAH IS THROUGH TORAH

Nowadays there is no way to do complete *teshuvah* for our sins without Torah study. This is because some sins can be atoned only through *korbanos*, offerings. *Teshuvah* is not enough.

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How do we *teshuvah* without *korbanos* today? Through Torah study. Our Sages taught, citing the verse “This is the Torah of the burnt offering, of the *minchah* offering, and the sin offering...” (*Vayikra* 7:37), that now, when we can no longer offer sacrifices, someone who is obligated to offer a sacrificial offering should study the passages of Torah that correspond to that sacrificial offering (*Menachos* 110a). When we study those parts of the Torah, it’s as if we brought those offerings. IMREI PINCHAS, ASERES YEMEI TESHUVAH

TESHUVAH CANNOT BEGIN WITHOUT TORAH

Rav Refael of Bershad, the disciple of Pinchas Koritzer, taught that the primary form of *teshuvah* is intense, increased Torah study. “Without this,” he explained, “*teshuvah* does not even begin!” IMREI PINCHAS, ASERES YEMEI TESHUVAH

TEMPORARY TESHUVAH: REUNITING THE PRINCE AND THE KING FOR AN HOUR

Once, after returning from a journey, Rav Pinchas Koritzer turned to his disciples and asked them, “What good is it to give *mussar* and help people do *teshuvah* if they end up returning to their former misdeeds and carry on sinning as they had before?”

He answered his own rhetoric with a parable:

There was once a prince who was captured by the enemy. His father, the king, pined away, wishing only to see his son again. If it were possible to free the prince and deliver him from bondage, how wonderful that would be! However, even if that were impossible to accomplish,

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and they could only manage to arrange for the prince to visit his father even just for an hour, and then the prince would have to return to his prison, would the king not happily rejoice that he had even just one hour in his beloved son's presence?

“Similarly,” explained Rav Pinchas, “even if we cannot make these people repent fully and do complete *teshuvah*, if we can just give them a desire for repentance and feelings of regret for just one hour alone, that, too, is of great benefit.” IMREI PINCHAS, ASERES YEMEI TESHUVAH

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TEACHINGS of RAV MOSHE CHAIM EFRAIM of SUDILKOV A GRANDSON OF THE BA'AL SHEM TOV AND THE AUTHOR OF *DEGEL MACHANEH EFRAIM*

TESHUVAH DEPENDS ON THE GEDOLIM

I received a tradition from the disciples of my holy grandfather the Ba'âl Shem Tov that the *gedolim* of the generation have the ability to purify the souls of *Bnei Yisrael* that have become sullied.

These souls have become filthy with the vile impurity of their sins, and so all the primary ways of *teshuvah* (whether confession, fasting, or crying) require the guidance of the leaders of the generation (who serve as a bridge to the upper worlds). DEGEL MACHANEH EFRAIM, TAZRIA

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THE LIGHT OF TORAH SHINES THROUGH TESHUVAH

Each and every Jew has his roots in the Torah — his own letter (that is, there are six hundred thousand archetypal souls, which correspond to the six hundred thousand letters of the Torah). When a person sins, Heaven forbid, he blemishes his corresponding letter in the Torah and dims its light. And when he returns to the proper path he had previously traveled and repents, he shines the light of the Torah anew. DEGEL MACHANEH EFRAIM, KI SISSA

SOWING SEEDS OF TESHUVAH

Our Sages taught that when someone repents out of love, his intentional sins are transformed into merits (*Yoma* 86b). This can be compared to seeds planted in the ground. When a seed is sown, it must first break down and decompose before a plant can grow from it. The same is true for one who repents out of love. DEGEL MACHANEH EFRAIM, LIKUTIM

BANISHING THE DARKNESS

When a person sins, he blemishes the spiritual light of his soul, which is drawn from the holy supernal light of the Torah, and his light is transformed into darkness, Heaven save us! When he truly repents, the light shines on him once more. As I heard from my holy grandfather the Baal Shem Tov, just as the darkness vanishes and is no longer discernible when a person brings a candle into a dark room, the same is true of a person who does *teshuvah*: although he was plunged into darkness by his sins, when he shines the light of the Torah on

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himself, the darkness vanishes completely without a trace. DEGEL
MACHANEH EFRAIM, LIKUTIM

PRAYING FOR SINNERS

I heard from my grandfather the holy Ba'al Shem Tov that when a person has sins that are left over from his previous lives (known as *gilgulim*, or incarnations), when he prays for the welfare of other sinners he rectifies those misdeeds. DEGEL MACHANEH EFRAIM, LIKUTIM

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TEACHINGS *of* REBBE NACHMAN *of* BRESLOV A GREAT-GRANDSON OF THE BA'AL SHEM TOV AND THE AUTHOR OF *LIKUTEI MOHARAN*

CONTINUOUS CONFESSION

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov taught that you must hold on to the attribute of *teshuvah* at all times. Even when a person is reciting the *vidui*, confession, and saying, "I have sinned, I have transgressed," even then it's not possible that he said it sincerely the first time. Therefore he must repent for the first time that he did *teshuvah*, which was not completely sincere. He even has to repent for the confession he said.

Even if he is certain that he did fully and sincerely repent, he must still repent the first *teshuvah* that he ever did. That first *teshuvah* that he did was based on his previous level of understanding. Later,

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when he repented again, there is no doubt that his understanding of Hashem's greatness (and of the magnitude of his misdeeds) has changed. Now that he has greater clarity and a better understanding than he did previously, he must do *teshuvah* for the way he did *teshuvah* previously. Happy is he who merits to do such *teshuvah*! LIKUTEI EITZOS

MESHIVAS NEFESH — RESTORING THE SOUL

If you wish to repent and return to Hashem, you must be well versed in walking down the path of Jewish law — “halachah” (which literally means “walkway” or “path”). This will prevent anything in this world from distancing you from Hashem or from causing you to stray, whether you are on your way up or down the path to spirituality.

No matter what happens to you and no matter what you experience, still you must strengthen yourself and “hold yourself up” (in Yiddish, “*der halten zich*”) by adhering to the halachah. Then you can fulfill the words of *Tehillim* (139:8): “If I travel to the heavens You [Hashem] are there, and if I make my bed in the pits of Gehinnom, You are there beside me as well.”

Even in the deepest darkest recesses of Gehinnom, you can come close to Hashem because He is found also there, for “if I make my bed in the pits of Gehinnom, You are there beside me.” LIKUTEI MOHARAN

HISHTAPCHUS HANEFESH — AN OUTPOURING OF THE SOUL

If you want to merit to do *teshuvah*, take on the habit of reciting *Tehillim*, which is a *segulah* for *teshuvah*. Why?

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There are fifty gates of repentance; forty-nine of them we are capable of opening and entering. These forty-nine gates of *teshuvah* correspond to the forty-nine letters that spell out the names of the twelve tribes of Israel — each and every gate corresponds to one letter from the names of the tribes. But the fiftieth gate belongs to Hashem's own *teshuvah*, so to speak, because even regarding Hashem we find the concept of *teshuvah*, as it says, “Return to Me [says Hashem] and I will return to you” (*Malachi* 3:7).

Everyone wants to be on the level where he fears Hashem, but not everyone merits to do *teshuvah*. Perhaps some people lack the awakening to do *teshuvah*; others, though they have been awakened to repent, fail to reach their personal gate to *teshuvah* and complete the process. Even those who manage to reach the gate may find it shut and locked due to their sins and they may need to redouble their efforts of *teshuvah*. This is why they fail in their efforts to do *teshuvah* fully.

By reciting *Tehillim*, however, even those who initially lacked any enthusiasm to repent are moved to do so, and they begin to feel an awakening to repent and return. This awakening is enough for them to reach the gate that corresponds to their letter and to open that gate.

This is the concept conveyed by the verse “These are the last words of David...the words of the man [i.e., King David] who was established on High...” (*Shmuel* II 23:1). Our Sages explain, “This teaches that King David established the yoke of *teshuvah* [that is, he showed us the way to repent after he repented of his sin with Batsheva]” (*Mo'ed Katan* 16b). In the same verse, King David is called the “sweet singer of Israel,” alluding to fact that he composed the book of *Tehillim*. Since he merited to “establish the yoke of *teshuvah*,” he infused this power of *teshuvah* into

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his *Tehillim*. This is why we are awakened to repent through *Tehillim*.

This is also what our Sages (*Avodah Zarah* 4b) meant when they said that King David was much greater and worthier than that action that is ascribed to him (the sin with Batsheva) — it only happened to him to teach individuals about the power of repentance. Thus we find that King David was the prime example of a *ba'al teshuvah*, and his book of Psalms is a path to *teshuvah*. He sang his psalms with such a great feeling of awakening and *ruach hakodesh* (divine intuition) that each and every individual can find their personal circumstances in the book of *Tehillim* on their own personal level, and through its power merit to repent.

The primary refinement of the twelve tribes, whose names comprise the forty-nine letters that correspond to the forty-nine gates of *teshuvah*, occurred in Egypt... Therefore, after the tribes were refined through their experience in Egypt and merited to leave, they counted forty-nine days of the Omer, which correspond to the aforementioned forty-nine letters that represent the forty-nine gates of repentance. On the fiftieth day, Hashem descended to Har Sinai (*Shemos* 19:20). This is what is meant by the idea we explained above, that Hashem's *teshuvah* of "I will return to you," is the fiftieth gate, since that is the day that Hashem, so to speak, "returned" or came close to us.

Therefore the final letters of the verse "*V'eileh shemos Bnei Yisrael haba'im* — These are the names of the children of Israel who were coming" (*Shemos* 1:1) spell the word *tehillim*, and the final letters of the second part of this verse, "*Mitzraymah eis Yaakov ish u'veiso* — to Egypt with Yaakov, each man and his household" spell the word *teshuvah*. This is because through saying *Tehillim*, we merit to do *teshuvah*.

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This, too, is the concept behind the verse listing the names of Yaakov's children who entered Egypt. The forty-nine letters that spell their names correspond to the forty-nine gates of repentance, showing that they went down into Egypt to be refined there, as just mentioned.

We can see for ourselves that during days of repentance — the month of Elul and the ensuing Ten Days of Repentance between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur — all of *Bnei Yisrael* take upon themselves to recite *Tehillim*, because saying *Tehillim* is a *segulah* for *teshuvah*. Saying *Tehillim* is a great and important thing, a way to rouse feelings of awakening toward Hashem. Happy is he who grasps this! LIKUTEI MOHARAN

THE BLESSINGS THAT TESHUVAH BRINGS

When a person does *teshuvah* and repents wholeheartedly, Hashem grants him a heart that can know Him. SEFER HAMIDDOS, TESHUVAH

The moment that a person decides to repent and do *teshuvah*, his prayers are immediately accepted even *before* he has done *teshuvah*. SEFER HAMIDDOS, TESHUVAH

Teshuvah heals the world: when one does *teshuvah* out of fear, his intentional sins are transformed into mistakes; when he repents out of love they are transformed into merits.

Thus *teshuvah* brings redemption closer and lengthens a man's

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days and the years of his life. Through *teshuvah*, however, not only he but also the entire world is forgiven. SEFER HAMIDDOS, TESHUVAH

Through *teshuvah*, the spirit of Mashiach blows and whispers like the wind over any harsh governmental decrees and cancels them. SEFER HAMIDDOS, TESHUVAH

Through *teshuvah*, a person's livelihood comes more easily. SEFER HAMIDDOS, TESHUVAH

Through Shabbos and *teshuvah*, one draws down upon himself the light of Mashiach. SEFER HAMIDDOS TESHUVAH

BRINGING THE WICKED BACK TO THE FOLD

When a Jew is moved and awakened to do *teshuvah* because of a feeling of impurity he experiences when attempting to pray and serve Hashem, then by repenting he affects not only himself but even those who are truly wicked and left the fold of *Klal Yisrael* because of their wicked misdeeds. He causes them to repent and return, and they themselves are transformed into a vehicle for sanctity, even aiding those who serve Hashem to build holy edifices. LIKUTEI EITZOS, TESHUVAH

THREE CONDITIONS

There are three conditions to *teshuvah*: the eyes must see, the heart must understand, and the ears must hear. A person must

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look for and *understand* his ultimate purpose in life, and he must be prepared to fulfill it. He must also *listen* and pay close attention to the words of our Sages — then he will merit to really succeed in doing *teshuvah* fully. LIKUTEI EITZOS

BARRIERS AND OBSTACLES AT THE BEGINNING OF A BA'AL TESHUVAH'S JOURNEY

When the light of *teshuvah* begins to shine within and awaken the penitent who is distant from anything that is holy, he may find that his way is impeded by various obstacles. He must exert great effort to overcome these obstacles and divest himself of his soiled garments. These garments that have been soiled with previous sins and misdeeds act as a barrier, like a river intersecting a road so that one cannot cross.

Do not allow your thoughts to confuse you or frighten you away from drawing close to Hashem. If you see that seemingly insurmountable obstacles prevent you from returning to Him, know that these are formed from your garments soiled by sin. You must suffer this exertion and some bitterness until you can divest yourself of these garments. Then these obstacles will vanish, and any barriers between you and holiness will cease to be. LIKUTEI EITZOS

GUARDING YOUR THOUGHTS FOR REPENTANCE

The meaning of *teshuvah* is to return something to its origin. The origin, or beginning, of all things is wisdom. For this reason, everyone must guard their wisdom and intellect from foreign, external

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influences, and especially from negative, impure thoughts, because all sins are rooted in a blemished wisdom that is left unguarded. This is the primary form of *teshuvah*. LIKUTEI EITZOS

True *teshuvah* is dependent on your heart, especially those thoughts that lie deep within your heart. Therefore strengthen yourself to flee from negative thoughts and to always think positively. Focus on the goal of returning to Hashem and use your imagination to think up strategies and ways to help you repent. This will aid you in acquiring the secrets of Torah wisdom, and the Torah wisdom that you have acquired will be the primary delight that you will experience in the next world. LIKUTEI EITZOS

TESHUVAH THROUGH TORAH

Teshuvah is primarily dependent on Torah. If you study Torah and exert yourself in your studies, you will come to understand how one concept is derived from another. Then you will merit to originate novel ideas and new interpretations for the sake of Heaven. This is a form of true and complete *teshuvah*, because creating *chiddushim* means creating new ideas and *teshuvah* is a form of rebirth and renewal. LIKUTEI EITZOS

THE JOURNEY OF TESHUVAH

Each person has unique experiences based on whatever came to pass on the stations along his life's journey. A truly complete *teshuvah* is defined by returning to the same places you previously traveled to and making different choices this time around. When you go through these

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situations again, and now you turn your back on them and prevail over your inclination — this is true *teshuvah*. LIKUTEI EITZOS

TESHUVAH ABOVE ALL

T*eshuvah* succeeds against any and all sins. Even the grave offense of intentionally wasting seed and any other forms of blemishes made on the bris — even these sins one can overcome with *teshuvah*.

Thus our Sages said, “There is truly nothing that stands in the way of *teshuvah*” (*Yerushalmi, Pe'ah* 1:1; *Sanhedrin* 103a). LIKUTEI EITZOS

EVEN JUST ONE DAY OF REPENTANCE IS VERY PRECIOUS

Once, Reb Noson of Nemirov overheard Rebbe Nachman reciting the *mishnah* “Repent one day before your death” (*Avos* 2:10). When he said the words and repeated them, Rebbe Nachman kept stressing “one day.”

What Rebbe Nachman meant to convey, taught Reb Noson, is the idea that repenting even one day during your lifetime before you leave this world is of the utmost significance.

So many people, Reb Noson explains, give up and are lost because although they awaken themselves to repent and return to Hashem, they are prevented from doing so by the day before and the day after — by their past and their future. The past holds them back because of the misdeeds it contains, and their future is impeded by similar personal obstacles.

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Rebbe Nachman tells us, "Seize the moment and repent even just 'one day' before you die." Repent even just one day of your life on this world, and don't let yourself be discouraged, for this one day is as precious as any treasure. Seize the moment, because if you do not seize this day, you might miss the opportunity. SICHOS HARAN

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV DOV BER, *the* MAGGID *of* MEZRITCH THE BA'AL SHEM TOV'S SUCCESSOR, ALSO KNOWN AS "DER GROISSER MAGGID," THE GREAT MAGGID

HIDDEN WITHIN THE SIN

Just as olive oil is hidden within the olive, so is *teshuvah* hidden within the sin itself. This is because, although repentance is one of the 613 commandments, one cannot repent unless he has sinned in the first place. *Teshuvah*, the possibility of repentance, is already hidden in its initial state of potential within the sin itself. LIKUTEI AMARIM

DISGUISED AS A MITZVAH

There are two types of people. One is truly wicked; he recognizes His Master and nonetheless rebels against Him. The other has been so blinded by his evil inclination that he and others around him are fooled into thinking that what he is doing is really good. They believe that he is a righteous Tzaddik. He might even study Torah and

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pray and afflict himself, but since he lacks true sincerity and faith in Hashem, his whole path is crooked and false.

The difference between the two is that there is hope for the truly wicked one. If he will one day pay heed to his feelings of remorse and does *teshuvah* wholeheartedly and beseeches Hashem for guidance, he can be saved.

The same cannot be said of someone who is fooled into thinking himself a Tzaddik! How can such a person ever do *teshuvah* when he does not even know that he is mistaken in the first place?

This is why, when the *yetzer hara* tries to seduce us into sinning, he tries to convince us that our misdeeds are actually mitzvos. This is a clever ploy — it prevents us from doing *teshuvah* over what we have done, because we don't think we have done anything that requires repentance! OHR TORAH

THE BROKEN EGG

There are two types of sin: when a person transgresses the word of G-d and he knows it, and when a person is so full of himself that he thinks he is truly serving Hashem and doing mitzvos like a Tzaddik. When the first type of person encounters thoughts of repentance and feelings of regret, he does *teshuvah*. But not the second type! When he experiences feelings of remorse, he simply thinks more highly of himself for feeling this way, and his vanity only worsens. This effectively prevents him from doing *teshuvah*.

It is like the woman who was holding an egg and boasted to all who would hear her how this little egg was going to make her rich. "This egg will make me a wealthy woman," she declared.

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“First I will hatch it and raise the chick, and she will grow to be a chicken. Instead of slaughtering the hen, I will let her lay more eggs, and those eggs will also hatch, and soon I will have an entire coop of chickens laying eggs for me. I shall sell some of them and buy a calf and raise her to be a cow. Instead of slaughtering the cow, I will breed more calves until I have a herd, and then I will sell some of them and buy a field...”

As she went on and on, bragging and boasting, she dropped the egg and it broke, and so did all her foolish fantasies come to an end.

When we first begin to learn and we tell ourselves, “One day I will be a great scholar and a true *chassid*,” these vain fantasies are so full of arrogance that they cancel out any possibility of attaining true spiritual greatness from the outset. OHR TORAH; DARKEI CHAIM

HASHEM’S PRIDE IN THE BA’AL TESHUVAH

There was once a king who had two sons. One son was faithful and dutiful toward the king. He could always be found at his father’s side. The second son was wayward and reckless. He could happily go for long periods of time without seeing his father more than once a week.

Eventually he grew so distant and rebellious that he took off and ran away. He disregarded his father’s deep, abiding love for him. Instead he blatantly shook off his father’s rule and decided to follow his own heart’s desires. He took up company with a band of vagabonds, thieves, and cutthroats.

The king could have sent armed guards after his son to force his return, but instead he exercised great mercy and restraint. Rather than punish his son, he pined after him and sighed longingly, “Woe is he who has exiled himself from his home and birthplace, and woe is the son

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who is not found at his father's table!"

One day the wayward son came to his senses and regretted his ways. He recalled his father's love and compassion and decided to return home. He would prostrate himself before his father, the king, and plead with him that he take him back.

And so he did. He prostrated himself and begged his father's forgiveness. "Father," he pleaded, "I have sinned and seen the error of my ways. Please forgive me!"

When the king heard his son's earnest entreaties, the king's compassion was roused and he took his son back. Seeing that his son's remorse was genuine filled him with joy. Finally he had his son back, the one whom he had almost given up any hope of ever seeing again. He took pride in his son for returning of his own good sense and was filled with love for him, for returning out of love for his father.

The king's affection and pride in the wayward son who had returned surpassed even those feelings he had for his dutiful son. He took the dutiful son's obedience for granted since it had never wavered, but the sudden upsurge of emotions that he felt at being reunited with his lost son was much greater.

The king forgave his son completely and absolved him of all wrongdoing. He raised his once-wayward son in stature and gave him a station above that of all his brothers.

This parable, explains the Maggid, illustrates how Hashem feels differently toward the *baal teshuvah* than for the Tzaddik who has never sinned. Like the wayward son of the king, a wicked sinner who once turned away from Hashem evokes great pride and joy when he finally returns. OHR TORAH

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV MENACHEM MENDEL *of* VITEBSK A DISCIPLE OF THE MAGGID OF MEZRITCH, THE FOUNDER OF THE OLD YISHUV IN ERETZ YISRAEL IN TEVERIA, AND THE AUTHOR OF *PRI HA'ARETZ*

THE LATENT POWER OF TESHUVAH WITHIN OURSELVES

Our Sages taught (*Kiddushin* 49b, according to the Rif) that if someone betroths a woman on the condition that he is a complete Tzaddik, and they find he is wicked, the agreement stands because perhaps he had thoughts of *teshuvah* at the moment he was betrothed. In that case, he wasn't wicked when they made the agreement.

The Vitebsker asks the obvious question: how can it be that *teshuvah*, which must be done wholeheartedly and consists of remorse over past misdeeds, be done so instantaneously? How is it possible to make such a dramatic about-face in a single moment, to now regard previously cherished misdeeds as hateful and disgusting actions and previously discarded mitzvos as desirable deeds?... How can such a transformation take place naturally?

The Vitebsker also asks why Hashem is so willing to accept the *ba'al teshuvah* the instant he disassociates from his past sinful behaviors. Most people are not so forgiving if someone wrongs them just because the person desisted from the negative behavior. They require the person to repeatedly ask for forgiveness before they even consider granting it. The

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Torah, however, teaches that for Hashem it is sufficient for the penitent to simply regret his sin and desist from it. How can this be?

The Vitebsker answers that according to our Sages' teachings, the creation of *teshuvah* preceded the creation of the world (*Pesachim* 54a; *Zohar*, *Vayikra* 69b). The world was created after the attribute of *teshuvah* already existed to silence the angelic prosecutors. When Hashem wanted to create the world, the angels argued against the creation of man. One of their arguments was that man was destined to anger Hashem and sin against Him, and so he should not be created. But since the possibility for *teshuvah* already existed, allowing man to transform his sins and return to Hashem, his creation is justified.

Man is a microcosm of the world (*Tikunei Zohar* 130b). It follows that just as *teshuvah* already existed in the world when the world was created, man also was created with the attribute of *teshuvah* within him. Therefore no matter where a person finds himself, even in the lowliest state, in the realm of the husks and shells of impurity known as the *klippos*, he need only remind himself of the primal power of *teshuvah* inherent in creation, and that this same powerful attribute is found within himself. Then all he needs is to awaken this latent power of *teshuvah* from within himself (by going through the *teshuvah* process, confession and so on), and he can completely transform his habits and nature and raise himself to the highest heights above nature to the supernatural state of pre-Creation...

In this state, the *baal teshuvah* is like a newborn child, pure and innocent, without sin, as he was when Hashem first created him. This is why Hashem can so readily accept his *teshuvah* — he is no longer the person he was when he sinned. PRI HA'ARETZ, RE'EH

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV CHAIM TYRER *of* CZERNOWITZ

A DISCIPLE OF RAV YECHIEL MICHEL, THE MAGGID OF
ZLOTCHOV, AND THE AUTHOR OF *BE'ER MAYIM CHAIM*
AND *SIDDURO SHEL SHABBOS*

SHABBOS: A TIME FOR TESHUVAH

Hashem teaches us that Shabbos is a time for repentance, because *teshuvah* is hinted at in its name. The letters that spell Shabbos (*shin, beis, tav*) form the acrostic “*Shabbos Bo Tashuv* — On Shabbos you should repent and return!” *SIDDURO SHEL SHABBOS*

TESHUVAH — EVERY DAY

Once, one of Rav Sa'adiah Gaon's students visited him unexpectedly in the night. To his bewilderment and fear, he found his Rebbe rolling around in the freezing ice and snow.

“Rebbe!” the *talmid* exclaimed. “Surely this is not necessary! Are your sins so great that you must resort to such excruciatingly painful forms of self-affliction? If a great *rav* such as yourself, who always safeguards himself from any blemish, even from sinful thoughts, afflicts himself like this, what can we say about ourselves? We who are full of sin from the days of our youth — why, afflictions worse than death would be too good for the likes of us!”

“My son,” Rav Sa'adiah Gaon replied, “you should know that I have never done this before, because I knew that I never committed a trans-

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gression that would require this of me. But recently I traveled to a certain town and found lodgings at the local inn, which was owned by a Jewish innkeeper. The innkeeper didn't recognize me — he didn't even know that I was a learned man who knew much Torah — and he treated me like any other guest.

“Then the news spread that I, Rav Sa'adiah Gaon, had come to town. Men, women, and children gathered to show their respects as befits a great rabbi and Torah scholar. When the innkeeper saw that the local townspeople had come to honor me, he, too, began to show me his respects and served me with great honor at every opportunity.

“When I was ready to depart, the entire community gathered to escort me, and this innkeeper fell before my feet, prostrating himself on the ground and pleading with me to forgive his earlier behavior, his slight on my honor and on the honor of the Torah. I told him that surely he had honored me to the best of his abilities. But he persisted and begged forgiveness for the way he had treated me at first. ‘Please,’ he cried, ‘I did not know then of the greatness of my master and teacher! I did not honor you properly as befits someone of your stature. I treated you as a commoner, and for this I beg your forgiveness. Please, Rabbi, forgive your servant for his neglect. I did not yet realize your greatness!’

“These words,” said Rav Sa'adiah Gaon, “penetrated the depths of my heart. This innkeeper fell to his knees, begging at my feet for forgiveness of his past misdeeds, for the sake of the honor of a mere mortal.

“All the more so when it comes to serving the Creator! I know all too well that my understanding and appreciation of His greatness and majesty grows daily commensurate with my *avodah* and my love and fear of Him. Therefore I am begging Him for forgiveness for my past

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misdeeds. I am afflicting myself in this way that He forgive my lack of service, and the deficiency of my love and fear of Him in the past. For it distresses me greatly — how could I not serve Hashem properly in the past, in the light of my appreciation of His greatness and awe today?

“Not only am I repenting my past misdeeds, but I recognize Hashem’s greatness more and more each and every day as my divine service grows. So I repent my past and do *teshuvah* daily over yesterday’s mistakes and my lack in showing proper honor and glory toward Hashem based on what I know today.” SIDDURO SHEL SHABBOS

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV MEIR *of* PREMISHLAN A DISCIPLE OF RAV YECHIEL MICHEL, THE ZLOTCHOVER MAGGID

THE DELICATE CLOCKWORK OF TESHUVAH

It is a well-known custom for the *kallah*’s side to give a *chassan* a new watch as a wedding gift. Rav Meir of Premishlan once explained the reason for this gift: to hint that a *chassan* must do *teshuvah*. How does the watch allude to this?

A new watch, explained Rav Meir, runs perfectly. But over time watches break down, not because of any negligence on the part of the watch owner, but rather the delicateness of the timepiece causes it to stop running eventually. A watch is a complex piece of machinery with many

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small, intricate components, with all kinds of cogs and levers, that must work in unison. If just one spoke or cog gets slightly bent out of shape, the entire clockwork stops functioning. Then one must bring the watch to an expert watchmaker to fix it. And how does he fix it? He takes it apart, separating all the pieces, until he finds the one that caused the malfunction.

Similarly, man was created perfect and just. His body is an intricate machine, with many complex systems that work together in unison. If he sins, however, he bends something out of shape and that damages his entire being.

What must be done? He must repent with a broken heart, dissecting his actions and taking himself apart until he finds his flaw and rectifies it so that the entire mechanism functions properly once again. DIVREI TORAH, MUNKACZ

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV MENACHEM NACHUM *of* CHERNOBYL A DISCIPLE OF BOTH THE BA'AL SHEM TOV AND THE MAGGID OF MEZRITCH, AND THE AUTHOR OF *ME'OR EINAYIM*

TESHUVAH THROUGH SHABBOS

T*eshuvah* can be attained only by safeguarding Shabbos, because a person cannot truly repent fully without Shabbos. This is because Shabbos, whose letters can be rearranged to spell *teisheiv*, “repent,” is a time that draws a person closer to Hashem and reconnects him to his Maker. ME'OR EINAYIM, KI SEITZEI

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TESHUVAH BEYOND SPACE AND TIME

Our Sages taught (*Kiddushin* 49b) that if a woman was betrothed to someone on the condition that he was a Tzaddik and they find that he is actually wicked, this is not grounds to dissolve the betrothal. They are still considered betrothed, because there is the slightest doubt regarding his status: perhaps he had thoughts of sincere repentance when he married her.

We see that in a single second, with just one fleeting thought of *teshuvah*, a person can be considered a Tzaddik! The reason for this is because *teshuvah* preceded the creation of the world (*Pesachim* 54a), which was created through speech, through Hashem's recitation of the ten utterances of the Creation ("Let there be light," etc.). Whatever preceded the world's creation also preceded speech. Before speech there was only thought. In that case, *teshuvah*, which preceded the Creation, must be connected to thought, which also preceded the Creation. He who repents therefore returns to his root source above all the worlds and rectifies all of creation...

Since *teshuvah* is connected to thought, and it is beyond creation, even just one single thought of *teshuvah* rectifies any corruption he might have brought about in this world with his misdeeds. ME'OR

EINAYIM

INSTANTANEOUS TESHUVAH

This world operates by time. Before Creation, there was no concept of time at all. Since *teshuvah* preceded the Creation, it is above time, and therefore *teshuvah's* power of rectification can occur in no time at all, even in a split second.

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Whoever thinks that the process of *teshuvah* is a time-consuming, lengthy affair is mistaken. He must believe with complete faith that he can repair everything in an instant. This is what our Sages meant when they said, “And if not now, when?” (*Avos* 1:14). If a person fools himself into thinking that he cannot repair whatever damage he has done through *teshuvah* now, in this instant, because he thinks that *teshuvah* is a lengthy process, when will he ever succeed in repairing what he has damaged? Even if he spends all the days of his life, as many days as there are grains of sand falling through an hourglass, repairing his sins, he will never succeed in doing *teshuvah* because such thoughts prevent him from doing true *teshuvah*. Know that *teshuvah* is above time, and in one instant you can rectify everything! ME’OR EINAYIM

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TEACHINGS *of*
RAV MORDECHAI *of* CHERNOBYL
ALSO KNOWN AS THE CHERNOBLER MAGGID,
THE SON AND SUCCESSOR OF RAV MENACHEM NACHUM
AND THE AUTHOR OF *LIKUTEI TORAH*

THE POWER OF A SINCERE SIGH

Once, there was a grievous sinner at the *tisch* of Rav Mordechai of Chernobyl. At one point, the sinner let out a great sigh, and the Chernobler Maggid declared, “Whoever does not believe that when a Jew sighs and repents Hashem immediately accepts him is a heretic!” LIKUTIM YEKARIM

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV ASHER *of* STOLIN THE SON OF RAV AHARON OF KARLIN

ONLY ONE THING REALLY BOTHERS ME

Once, during the confession of Yom Kippur, Rav Asher of Stolin cried out as he said the words “And on the sin that we sinned before You!” He cried out, “So what if they have to roast us in the fires of Gehinnom for our sins? So what?! That is the will of Hashem! Only one thing truly bothers me, just one thing! That ‘we sinned before You.’ Oy vey! Before Whom did I sin? Before Whom am I guilty? To You! Only to You!” MATEH AHARON

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV ELIMELECH *of* LIZHENSCK ALSO KNOWN AS “THE HOLY REBBE REB MEILECH” AND “THE REBBE OF ALL REBBES” AND THE AUTHOR OF *NOAM ELIMELECH*

HIS POWER, OUR TESHUVAH

The Maharsh of Belz once said, “Whatever *teshuvah* a Jew did in the past and whatever *teshuvah* a Jew does today and whatever *teshuvah* any Jew will do in the future all came about through the power of the Rebbe Reb Elimelech, *zy”a*.” SHELOSH ESREI OROS, LIZHENSCK

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HIS HOLY TZION

Rav Mendel Rimanover used to say that it is a well-known *segulah* for *teshuvah* to visit the *tzion* (grave site) of the holy Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk. ESER TZACHTZACHOS

THROUGH THE TZADDIK

The primary awakening that pushes a person to repent comes through the Tzaddik. NOAM ELIMELECH, YISRO

When the Tzaddik finds within himself even a small speck of sin and rebukes himself in front of others, finding fault with himself and bemoaning his lack in serving Hashem properly, then the hearts of those who hear the Tzaddik's self-rebuke are also roused to do *teshuvah*. The Tzaddik elevates them to a higher level of sanctity, just as he elevates all of *Klal Yisrael* higher and higher. LIKUTEI SHOSHANAH

PROPER TESHUVAH

When you find yourself alone, you should pace back and forth and roam through the four corners of your home while you contemplate how you sinned against Hashem, the King of kings. Cry a river of tears over your misdeeds with sincere remorse. Accept upon yourself never to repeat the same mistakes. Do this on a daily basis, and surely Hashem will forgive your sins. NOAM ELIMELECH, MISHPATIM

YOUR PERSONAL EXODUS

When you repent your sins, you are released from the bondage of the *klippos* (the husks and shells of impurity). This is your

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redemption, your personal exodus from Egypt. NOAM ELIMELECH,
BAMIDBAR

REBBE ELIMELECH'S TESHUVAH

The Rebbe Reb Elimelech said that when he repented and examined his deeds, he went so far back that he even did *teshuvah* for causing his mother pain as a nursing infant. Some said that he afflicted himself so harshly that he burned his hands by casting them into candles and flaming furnaces to repent for his misdeeds in infancy! DIVREI CHAIM, KI SAVO

Rav Klonymous Kalman Epstein of Krakow relates something similar in his *sefer Ma'or VaShemesh* about Rebbe Elimelech's *teshuvah*. He writes that he heard from the Rebbe Reb Elimelech that he went so far back in examining his misdeeds that he even did *teshuvah* for causing his mother pain when she was expecting. MA'OR VASHEMESH, MASEI

HOW CAN A JEWISH SOUL POSSIBLY SIN?

The Divrei Chaim of Tzanz related that his Rebbe and mentor, Rav Naftali of Ropshitz, a disciple of the Rebbe Reb Elimelech, taught in his master's name that when you do *teshuvah*, it must be a complete *teshuvah*. What does that mean? When you repent, you must go back, examining all of your misdeeds, and repent even over the first sin you ever did in your entire life.

In this vein, we can understand the *Zohar's* explanation (*Vayikra* 13b) of the verse "*Nefesh ki secheta...* — If a soul shall sin..." (*Vayikra* 4:2). The *Zohar* reads this verse as if the Torah is asking a question:

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“*Nefesh ki secheta?!?*” How could a Jewish soul possibly sin in the first place? The answer is simple. Sin is a chain reaction. Our Sages taught that sin drags after it more sin — “*aveirah goreres aveirah*” (*Avos* 4:2). Otherwise, how is it possible that a Jew could commit grave sins? It is because initially he must have done some lesser, lighter misdeed that eventually led him to sin more grievously.

It follows that each sin a person does is an outgrowth of the very first sin that he ever did, which was surely an unintentional mistake that snowballed until the sinner reached his current state. That is why he must examine his misdeeds as far back as the first sin he ever committed. DIVREI CHAIM, SHABBOS TESHUVAH

SHABBOS: THE ROOT OF TESHUVAH

The Chozeh of Lublin taught in the name of his master and Rebbe, the Rebbe Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk, that Shabbos is the source of all repentance. This is because the name Shabbos has the root word *shav*, “repent and return” — in other words, Shabbos is the time to do *teshuvah*! DIVREI EMES, MATTOS

HIS HOLY SHABBOS

Rav Shlomo Bobover once related that one of the Tzaddikim met an Old Jewish woman who had served as a maidservant in the home of the Rebbe Reb Meilech in her youth. She recounted how every Friday after *chatzos* (midday), the holy Tzaddik would enter the kitchen, where the maidservants and cooks were preparing for Shabbos, place his hand on the mezuzah, and declare, “The holy Shabbos is coming! We must prepare ourselves and think thoughts of *teshuvah*.”

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The old woman added that at that moment, as soon as the Rebbe Reb Meilech said those words, “all of us, the cooks and maids, were roused by such an awakening, and we were filled with such feelings of repentance and remorse, that we all began weeping and begging each other for forgiveness, as one customarily does on *erev Yom Kippur* before Kol Nidrei.” NOAM SHABBOS, BOBOV

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV MESHULEM ZISSEL *of* ANIPOLI ALSO KNOWN AS “THE REBBE REB ZISHA,” A DISCIPLE OF THE MEZRITCHER MAGGID AND THE OLDER BROTHER OF RAV ELIMELECH OF LIZHENSK

THE TESHUVAH OF THE REBBE REB ZISHA

During the ten days of *teshuvah* between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, the Rebbe Reb Zisha sat and received his congregants to bestow on them blessings and advice. The entire community of Anipoli stood waiting their turn for an audience with the Tzaddik, and while the Rebbe sat there in *deveikus*, in constant connection with the Creator, his eyes turned heavenward, as was his custom, and one of the assembled was seized with a sudden passion to repent. He began to sob, and as one flame ignites another, soon the entire assembly was weeping as a great awakening seized them all.

The great Tzaddik seized the opportunity and raised his hands in supplication. He beseeched the Almighty, “*Ribbono shel olam!* Master of

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the world! Surely now is an auspicious moment for me to do *teshuvah*. But what can Zisha do? I have no strength to do *teshuvah* properly. So what can I do but to send you the letters that spell *teshuvah*, and You, Master of the world, shall join them together. *Tav*: ‘*Tamim tiheyeh im Hashem Elokecha* — Be sincere and faithful with Hashem, your G-d’ (*Devarim* 18:13). *Shin*: ‘*Shivisi Hashem l’negdi samid* — I have placed Hashem before me at all times’ (*Tehillim* 16:8). *Vav*: ‘*V’ahavta l’rei’acha kamocho* — Love your fellow as yourself’ (*Vayikra* 19:18). *Beis*: ‘*Bechold derachecha da’eiho* — Know Him in all your ways’ (*Mishlei* 3:6). *Hei*: ‘*Hatznei’a leches im Elokecha* — Walk modestly with your G-d’ (*Michah* 6:8). By these commands, Hashem, I will serve You!”

This was the *teshuvah* of the Tzaddik, the Rebbe Reb Zisha of Anipoli. PEULAS TZADDIKIM

AS LONG AS THE CANDLE BURNS

The Rebbe Reb Meilech of Lizhensk and his brother the Rebbe Reb Zisha of Anipoli wandered together in self-imposed exile for years to arouse repentance in the hearts and souls of the Jews with whom they came in contact. Once, they took lodgings in the home of a local villager. The man of the house was away and only arrived late that night. When he came home, he lit a candle and sat down at the table to mend his fur overcoat. “Hurry,” they overheard his wife call out. “Hurry up and mend it! You only have as long as the candle burns!”

When the brothers heard that, they immediately turned to each other and exclaimed, their faces full of wonder, “Did you hear that? What a lesson! Fix it, as long as the candle burns. As long as the flame of the Jewish soul burns bright, there is still a chance to mend it!” SIACH SARFEI KODESH

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RETURN, RETURNING CHILDREN!

The Rebbe Reb Zisha translated the words “*Shuvu banim shovavim*” (Yirmeyahu 3:22) as “Return, you returning children!” He taught that this alludes to the concept of repenting for one’s previous *teshuvah* (since each day you should have gained a new understanding of your service of Hashem, so your previous *teshuvah* has proven to be inadequate). So, you penitent children, who have already done *teshuvah*, still you must return! TORAS AVOS

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV SHMUEL SHMELKE HOROWITZ *of* NIKOLSBERG ALSO KNOWN AS “THE REBBE REB SHMELKE,” A MAIN DISCIPLE OF THE MEZRITCHER MAGGID AND THE AUTHOR OF *DIVREI SHMUEL*

THE DECISION TO REPENT GRANTS YOU AN AUDIENCE WITH THE KING

The Rebbe Reb Shmelke told the following parable:
A debtor owed the king a large sum of money. As long as he did not work out a payment plan for the money he had borrowed, he would not be granted an audience with the king. Once he worked out a payment plan, even before he had finished repaying the debt, he was allowed to come before the king and was granted permission for an audience with his majesty.

Similarly, once a person has made up his mind to repent, even

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though he has not yet done so, his prayers are allowed to ascend on High. His decision prevents his petitions from being cast aside, Heaven forbid, by the external forces of darkness. Although one must fully repent by actually rectifying his past misdeeds, as soon as he takes to heart the desire to repent, on that very day that he decides to do *teshuvah*, he can come before the King.

This requires an outpouring of tears during prayer, but they should be tears of joy (at having the opportunity to repent) that heal the soul. If he does cry out of sadness and pain, Hashem will also have mercy on him and heal him, for He heals all flesh, especially the downtrodden, the brokenhearted, and the depressed, but tears of joy are better. DIVREI SHMUEL

THE DECISION TO REPENT BRINGS PEACE OF MIND

The Rebbe Reb Shmelke told the following parable:

As long as a young man has not betrothed anyone to him as his bride, he is in a state of doubt. He is unsure if a prospective bride is the right match for him — perhaps it is another? The bride is just as uncertain. Neither has a clear mind.

When the engagement finally takes place, even before the two are brought under the wedding canopy and wed, they have both already achieved clarity of mind and their minds are settled.

Similarly, when a person sincerely decides to repent, immediately he achieves clarity of thought even before he reaches any levels of sanctity and fulfillment. He has already acquired peace of mind the moment he has decided to repent, even before has actually done so. DIVREI SHMUEL

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HARVEST OF TESHUVAH

“Days are coming,” says Hashem, ‘and the plowman shall meet the reaper’” (*Amos* 9:13). This is the way of the world, taught the Rebbe Reb Shmelke. First you must plow and break the earth by making furrows. Then you can sow seeds and plant them. It rains and the seeds grow into stalks of wheat. The time comes when they are ripe for the harvest and you can reap what you have sown.

This is also the path of *teshuvah*: first you must “plow” your body and break your selfish desires and passions, as it says, “A broken heart G-d shall not despise” (*Tehillim* 51:19). Then you plant and water the *teshuvah* with tears of remorse, and finally you can harvest the benefits. IMREI SHMUEL, KEDOSHIM

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TEACHINGS of RAV LEVI YITZCHAK DERBARMIDIGGER, *the* BERDITCHEVER RAV

ALSO KNOWN AS THE “SANIGORAN SHEL YISRAEL” (DEFENDER OF ISRAEL), A DISCIPLE OF RAV SHMELKE OF NIKOLSBERG AND THE MAGGID OF MEZRITCH, AND THE AUTHOR OF *KEDUSHAS LEVI*

TESHUVAH EVERY DAY

There are two types of sinners. One is the sinner who has actually committed sinful acts. The other is in the category called *baal teshuvah*, literally, “master of return,” and he is considered holy. Regarding him the verse says, “*Ohr zarua laTzaddik* — There is a light

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planted for the righteous” (*Tehillim* 97:11), because he contemplates yesterday’s deeds and reexamines his behavior, and he concludes that he has sinned, though in actuality he is being critical of himself.

He comes to this conclusion because today the revelation of Hashem that he has experienced is greater and stronger than that of the previous day. Therefore he does *teshuvah* each day for yesterday’s actions and behavior. However, his sins are considered unintentional, because yesterday he lacked today’s revelation. This is what the Gemara means when it says, “Willful transgressions are transformed into unintentional ones” (*Yoma* 86b). KEDUSHAS LEVI, VAYEIRA

MATTAN TORAH EVERY DAY

An awakening to do *teshuvah* comes to us every day, originating in the voice of Hashem that we all heard on Mount Sinai. That voice declared, “I am Hashem, your G-d” (*Shemos* 20:2) and “You shall have no other gods before Me” (*ibid.* 20:3). This voice was inscribed on our hearts, and it brings about an awakening in us to repent on a daily basis. KEDUSHAS LEVI, CHAYEI SARAH

REBORN THROUGH TESHUVAH

Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev taught that we should pay particular attention to the words “as of old,” in the *pasuk* “Return us to You, Hashem, and we will return; renew our days as of old” (*Eichah* 5:21–22). The Berditchever elucidated this verse with a midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 21:6) that cites another verse: “And now, *Bnei Yisrael*, what is it that Hashem asks of you but to fear Him?” (*Devarim* 10:12).

The Midrash teaches us that the words “and now” refer to repen-

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tance. The Berditchever explained that each and every person must believe with complete faith that the Creator renews our life at each and every moment, as our Sages taught, “Praise Hashem with each and every breath you take” (*Bereishis Rabbah* 14:9). At every moment our vitality tries to escape from us, and the Holy One sends a person new vitality to replace it. Therefore, at this very moment — or in the language of the Midrash, “and now” — we are reborn again.

In that case, at the same moment that a person repents, he is reborn and it is as if he is a new being. And so Hashem, in His great mercy, takes no notice of his previous sins. However, if he does not believe this — that he has been reborn, that the Creator gives him new life each and every moment — then his *teshuvah* will not succeed.

This is the meaning of the pasuk in *Eichah*: “Return us to You, Hashem, and we will return.” How will we return? If You “renew our days as of old” — by infusing us with vitality so that we are reborn and become new beings, clean of sin. KEDUSHAS LEVI, DERUSHIM

JEALOUS OF A SINNER

Once, the Berditchever was walking down the street in Berditchev when he bumped into a well-known apostate. This was a man who was recognized for his many sins, and he had the reputation of a lowly good-for-nothing. To this man’s great astonishment, Rav Levi Yitzchak gave him a warm and hearty greeting. He grabbed the wicked man by the lapels of his coat and cried out, “I am so jealous of you!”

Nothing could have surprised the man more. “You, Rebbe?” he said, dumbfounded. “You are jealous of *me*?”

“Yes, I know you have sinned, but our Sages taught that when you

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repent out of love, your willful transgressions are transformed into merits (*Yoma* 86b). Just consider how many merits you will have when you repent!”

“Wait a few more days, and you will be even more jealous of me,” the wicked man retorted (intimating that he would sin some more). But the Rebbe’s sincere words and warm demeanor worked their magic, and the man repented. He eventually became one of the most pious, G-d-fearing Tzaddikim in Berditchev. OTZAR YISRAEL

KNOW THAT YOU HAVE NOT EVEN BEGUN

Our Sages taught, “In the place where *ba’alei teshuvah* stand, even the righteous cannot stand” (*Berachos* 34b). To understand just what the actual *avodah* of *teshuvah* is, we must explain that this *gemara* does not refer to a one-time repentance over past sins, but to being in a constant state of repentance, as our Sages taught elsewhere, “All the day’s of a person’s life should be spent in *teshuvah*” (*Shabbos* 153a).

This means that a person’s heart should always be broken; he should always feel empty and lacking and distant from Hashem. By contemplating Hashem’s vast greatness, a person will truly comprehend his own lowly insignificance, that he does not even take up any space in this world. He will come to understand that when taking into consideration Hashem’s greatness, it is as if he has not even begun serving Hashem! This is what it means to be in a state of *teshuvah*.

When you serve Hashem in a state of *teshuvah* so that your very existence is constantly nullified, you are a true *ba’al teshuvah*. Even if you are a complete Tzaddik, who fulfills all the mitzvos, but you lack

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this brokenhearted self-subjugation, you cannot stand in the place of such a *ba'al teshuvah*. KEDUSHAS LEVI, LIKUTIM

A BA'AL TESHUVAH VS. A "COMPLETE" TZADDIK

Once, taught Rav Yissachar Ber of Zlotchov, I heard my teacher and Rebbe, the pious chassid Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, explain the Sages' statement "In the place where *ba'alei teshuvah* stands, even the righteous cannot stand" (*Berachos* 34b). How can a *ba'al teshuvah*, who once rebelled against the King, be greater than a Tzaddik who never transgressed from infancy?

Who is considered a true *ba'al teshuvah*? He is a person who is enlightened on a daily basis with new insights about Hashem that he did not have the day before. He therefore rejects yesterday's *avodah*, imagining that he did not serve Hashem sufficiently, because compared to today's understanding of Hashem's greatness and his own lowliness, yesterday's *avodah* was lacking. So he does *teshuvah* for yesterday's seeming lack of good deeds.

In his place a complete Tzaddik cannot stand. This refers to someone who sees himself as complete and finds no lack in himself. He does not see anything missing in his *avodah* and has no cause for regret. Such a person, who fails to see his own shortcomings and imagines he is a complete Tzaddik, cannot stand before a *ba'al teshuvah* who constantly tries to do better than he did the day before. MEVASER TZEDEK, VAYIKRA, METZORA

A BA'AL TESHUVAH IS CALLED "PESACH"

Rav Yissachar Ber of Zlotchov taught that they say in the name of Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev that once, while he was explain-

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ing the Pesach Haggadah, he commented that the term *Pesach*, which literally means “pass over,” refers to the *baal teshuvah*. While the Tzadik rises continually from one level to the next, the *baal teshuvah* has the ability to pass over and skip several levels in one leap. MEVASER TZEDEK, ACHAREI MOS

WHAT IS HASHEM'S TESHUVAH?

Once, when the Berditchever reached the words “*Melech Rachaman shetashuv u’seracheim aleinu* — Merciful King! We ask that You return once again, to have mercy upon us!” in the *Mussaf* prayers of *yom tov*, he went on to beseech Hashem on behalf of *Bnei Yisrael*, as was his custom. He said, “*Shetashuv u’seracheim aleinu* — Master of the world! You, too, need to do *teshuvah*! What is Your *teshuvah*? How does G-d repent? By having mercy upon us!” YALKUT KEDUSHAS LEVI

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV SHNEUR ZALMAN *of* LIADI A DISCIPLE OF THE MEZRITCHER MAGGID, THE FOUNDER OF CHABAD CHASSIDUS, AND THE AUTHOR OF *TANYA*

THE POWER OF TESHUVAH OUT OF LOVE

He who eats choice meats and drinks fragrant wines in order to expand his mind and better serve Hashem and study His Torah or to perform the mitzvah of enjoying Shabbos and *yom tov* is able to refine the essence of the meat and wine and release it from the husk

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known as “*klippas noga*.” This is as pleasing to Hashem as a fragrant burnt offering. . . . However, he who is a glutton and gorges on meat and wine to satisfy the desire of his animal soul alone...causes the essence of the meat and wine within him to descend into the completely evil *klippos*. Then his body acts as a vehicle for the *klippos* — at least, until he repents through *teshuvah* and serving Hashem and studying His Torah. Since the meat and wine were kosher, they can be elevated together with him when he returns to Hashem.

This is the meaning of “*heter*,” which connotes permitted foods. Literally, it means “unfettered” or “unbound” because they are not bound to the exterior negative forces, as opposed to nonkosher foods, which are “*assur*,” forbidden — literally, “bound” to the negative forces — and cannot be released to ascend to Hashem... Any forbidden foods that a person might have eaten already will remain bound to the negative forces until the day when Hashem ends all death or until the person repents and does such a lofty form of *teshuvah* that his willful transgressions are transformed into actual merits.

This form of *teshuvah* is a *teshuvah* done out of an intense, fierce love that comes from the depths of his heart and out of such a passion to attach himself to Hashem that he is like a parched soul in a wasteland. He feels as if until today he dwelled in a desert wilderness far from Hashem, where he thirsted for Hashem’s presence.

This is why our Sages taught that in the place where *baàlei teshuvah* stand, not even great Tzaddikim can stand (*Berachos* 34b), since such a great and lofty *teshuvah* as this can transform willful transgressions into merits and release the bound essence in forbidden acts and foods (*Yoma* 86b). *Teshuvah* that is not done out of love, however, though it

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is sincere and surely Hashem will forgive him, is unable to transform transgressions into merits. TANYA, SEFER SHEL BEINONIM

TRUE TESHUVAH VS. FASTING

The Torah's definition of *teshuvah* is simply disengagement from the act of sin — to stop doing the sin. This is the definition that the Gemara cites in chapter 3 of *Sanhedrin* and in *Choshen Mishpat* (end of *siman* 34) regarding the testimony given by a witness who is a sinner. (A sinner's testimony is invalid, so the *Shulchan Aruch* asks, if the sinner who was disqualified from giving testimony now wishes to repent, at what point is his *teshuvah* accepted and his testimony valid? The answer is, when he stops doing the sin.)

This means that he must decide in his heart, fully and sincerely, that he will never again do those things and transgress the King's commandments, whether the positive or negative commandments. This is the primary definition of *teshuvah* — not fasting, as most people believe. TANYA, IGGERES HATESHUVAH

THE PROBLEM WITH EXCESSIVE FASTING

Someone who gets sick from repeatedly fasting, especially nowadays, should refrain from doing so for the sake of *teshuvah* (this does not refer, of course, to halachically mandated fasts, but to taking upon oneself to fast as part of one's repentance). He should refrain from fasting even if he has committed severe transgressions, such as those that incur capital punishment or *kareis* (spiritual excision), and even if he has transgressed many positive commandments and prohibitions. All the more so if he is learned and can study Torah — if he fasts, he is considered a sinner and

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will be punished for fasting because it weakens him and prevents him from learning Torah properly. TANYA, IGGERES HATESHUVAH

NO DOUBT THAT OUR TESHUVAH IS ACCEPTED

When we do *teshuvah*, Hashem, in His great compassion, forgives us immediately. This fact is clearly demonstrated by the blessing of forgiveness that we recite when we pray *Shemoneh Esrei*. First we ask for Hashem's forgiveness for our sins, and immediately after we pronounce, "*Baruch atah Hashem chanun hamarbeh lisloach* — Blessed are You, Hashem, the Compassionate One, who forgives abundantly."

In Jewish law, the general rule of thumb is that when in doubt we do not recite a blessing. We can conclude that the very fact that we recite this blessing clearly indicates that there is no doubt that Hashem pardons us after we have beseeched His forgiveness. TANYA, IGGERES HATESHUVAH

TESHUVAH IS NOT JUST FOR SINNERS

Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad Chassidus, taught that *teshuvah* is not just for sinners. Everyone must do *teshuvah*, because the very definition of *teshuvah* is "return."

Teshuvah is the process whereby we return the soul to its root source, where she was once bound up in her Creator and attached to the Source of life, to Hashem. She descended from that lofty plane and enrobed herself in this physical world. Any spiritual achievements that she attains while in this world pale in comparison to her degree of spirituality when she was on High, because in the physical world she is

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bound by such constraints as time and place.

The only way to return her to her Source is by “crying and calling out to Hashem from our distress and constraints” (*Tehillim* 107:19). What are these constraints? Time and space — they are in and of themselves boundaries to achieving lofty spiritual levels. Out of the very bitterness that we feel about these barriers, our love and desire for Hashem will grow correspondingly and exponentially. Thus, “from our distress” we will yearn to attach ourselves to the light of the Infinite One. This is the “light that draws benefit from the darkness” (*Koheles* 2:13).

This is what our Sages meant when they said, “In the place where *baàlei teshuvah* stand, even the righteous cannot stand” (*Berachos* 34b). The *Zohar* explains that *baàlei teshuvah* (those who return their souls to their root source) have greater strength than the Tzaddik. This is because the light of the Infinite One is truly revealed in their souls so their animal soul, their body’s vitality, and their abilities and traits are transformed and returned to Hashem, as darkness is transformed into light. TORAH OHR, VAYECHI

TESHUVAH IS FOR TZADDIKIM

Some people make the mistake of thinking that *teshuvah* is meant only for sinners. They mistakenly believe that only lowly, unworthy people who have transgressed the commandments must repent. The truth is that *teshuvah* is a much loftier process than just rectifying sins.

The *Zohar* teaches us (*Naso* 122a) that the word *teshuvah* is a compound of the two words “*tashuv hei*,” which means, “Return the letter *hei* to its proper place.” There are two types of *heis* (found in Hashem’s four-letter Name, *Yud-Kei-Vav-Kei*). The first is called the “*hei ila*,” or

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“upper *hei* (and it corresponds to the *sefirah*, attribute, of *binah*, insight). The second is the “*hei tata*,” or “lower *hei*” (which corresponds to the lower *sefirah* of *malchus*, kingship). When a person interrupts his Torah study or prayers with mundane thoughts or speech, they separate the *heis* from the divine Name, so to speak (which is equivalent to erasing Hashem’s Name, heaven forbid, a grave sin). The Tzaddikim must then repair the spiritual damage and return the *heis* to their proper place.

Thus we can say that those who study Torah and dwell in a house of study have the power to restore the letter *heis* to their proper place. Generally speaking, the study of the Written Torah corresponds to the *hei ila*, and the Oral Torah or Talmud corresponds to the *hei tata*. More specifically, lofty thoughts, such as meditating on the greatness of Hashem and having intense concentration during prayers, correspond to the *hei ila*. Through these meditations one can restore that *hei*. Speech, such as pronouncing the words of the Torah that one is studying and praying, corresponds to the *hei tata*. *Teshuvah*, then, is about returning the *heis* to their proper place through these meditations and words of Torah. MA’AMAREI ADMOR HAZAKEIN HAKETZARIM

THE POWER OF CONFESSION AGAINST THE PROSECUTING ANGEL

A primary form of *teshuvah* is to verbally confess the sin you have transgressed, describing it in detail. Why do we do this? When you sin, you create an adversary — a prosecuting angel — which is called by the very same name as the sin you committed. For example, if someone eats pork, the prosecutor is named “You Ate Pork.”

The prosecuting angel draws its life force from the very letters that

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spell his name — that spell the sin that was committed. This is how the first man, Adam, named the animals: when he looked at them, he discerned the letters that gave them life. For example, when he looked at a horse, he discerned that the letters *samech-vav-samech* give it life, so he named the horse “*sus*.”

Therefore when a person confesses and regrets his actions, saying, “I no longer wish to do this sin anymore,” he is removing the life force from the prosecuting angel that he created with that sin, effectively killing it, because he has taken away the letters that form the name that gives him life. MA’AMAREI ADMOR HAZAKEIN HAKETZARIM

TESHUVAH TRANSFORMS A HEART OF STONE

To understand why the power of *teshuvah* is so great, we must understand that *teshuvah* is a transformation, and its power lies in a great novelty that results from this transformation.

To illustrate, a precious stone is valuable because it reflects light and this makes it beautiful. Now you might ask, “Doesn’t a candle shine more brightly than any precious gemstone?” But the true value of a gemstone is the fact that even though it is only a rock, it still shines! This is the great novelty — that a piece of rock can shine — and that is why it is so precious.

Similarly, a person’s hardened heart is called a “heart of stone.” When he transforms his will and changes himself to serve Hashem, his heart shines. This is a great novelty and very precious in Hashem’s eyes. When our hearts of stone shine, we call them precious gemstones and we make them into “jewelry” to adorn the Shechinah, who is like a bride. There are

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many kinds of jewelry and precious gems, some more valuable than others. When the bride is bejeweled with all these precious gems, then she is pleasing and beautiful to her husband (i.e., HaKadosh Baruch Hu, the male aspect of Divinity). MA'AMAREI ADMOR HAZAKEIN HAKETZARIM

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV YISRAEL HOPSTEIN *of* KOZNITZ, *the* KOZNITZER MAGGID

ONE OF THE PRIMARY DISCIPLES OF THE REBBE REB MEILECH
AND THE AUTHOR OF *AVODAS YISRAEL*

MAKING HASHEM “YOUR” G-D THROUGH TESHUVAH

The Koznitzer Maggid commented on the verse “Repent and return to Hashem, your G-d” (*Hoshea* 14:2), from the haftorah of Shabbos Teshuvah. You should repent and return, said the Maggid, until you can call Hashem “your G-d” — until the Creator becomes your own personal source of G-dliness. This means that you do *teshuvah* until you become a vehicle for His holiness (that is, living a life of sanctity and acting holy according to the Torah’s dictates). Then you can be close to Hashem without any barriers and beseech Him in prayer, as one might speak to his best friend and confidant. When you recite a blessing, for example, and say, “*Baruch Atah Hashem* — Blessed are You, Hashem,” you should feel as if you are actually standing before Hashem without any barriers or foreign thoughts separating you. AVODAS YISRAEL

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THE BA'AL TESHUVAH'S PERSONAL DELIVERANCE FROM GEHINNOM

The Koznitzer Maggid commented on the verse “You should take it to heart...and return to Hashem, your G-d...and then Hashem will bring you back...” (*Devarim* 30:1–4) that just as there are seven supernal palaces, or holy heavenly chambers on High (see *Chagigah* 12b, which lists the seven levels of Heaven), there are also seven impure chambers — the seven “pits” of Gehinnom.

If a person falls and sinks down among the husks and shells of impurity known as the *klippos*, heaven forbid, then he is actually in Gehinnom (a spiritual state where he is far from Hashem). If he wishes to repent and return to Hashem, the first thought that should enter his mind is that Hashem loves *Bnei Yisrael* so much that He is willing to descend to the seven pits of Gehinnom Himself to personally lift him out and bring him back to Him.

Thus said David HaMelech: “You saved my soul from the lowest pits” (*Tehillim* 86:13) — You, Hashem, personally redeemed me from the lowest pits of Gehinnom. AVODAS YISRAEL, NITZAVIM

FLEE FROM EVIL AND LATER TEND YOUR WOUNDS

Rav Meir Yechiel, also known as the “Seraph of Mogolintza,” the Fiery Angel of Mogolintza, once taught in the name of the holy Koznitzer Maggid that a person who wishes to repent must first push away any thought of the magnitude of the sins he committed. Do not initially attempt to rectify any blemish your misdeeds have caused on High. Rather, your first task should be to flee from the evil inclination

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who is pursuing you. Send him away, cast him out, and obliterate the evil from your character by building yourself up: serving Hashem with love and awe and other good traits. Once you rectify your character, then you can repair your flaws and focus on the specific misdeeds you did.

He related a parable to illustrate this idea: There was once a soldier who was pursued by another soldier from the opposing army. The pursuer was a champion warrior and managed to bruise and batter his fleeing opponent. If the soldier who was fleeing would have stopped to tend to his many injuries, his pursuer would have caught up with him and dealt the final death blow. The correct course of action was to run for his life and not look back. Once he was safe and no longer had any doubts whether he had escaped his pursuer, then he could find someone to heal him and tend to his wounds. TIFERES CHAIM

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV AVRAHAM
YEHOSHUA HESCHEL *of* APT
ONE OF THE PRIMARY DISCIPLES OF THE REBBÉ REB MEILECH
AND THE AUTHOR OF *OHEV YISRAEL*

WHERE THE BAAL TESHUVAH STANDS

Our Sages taught, “In the place where *baalei teshuvah* stand, even the righteous cannot stand” (*Berachos* 34b). This is because the stature of someone who has repented is much loftier than that of the Tzaddik.

How can someone who never tasted sin, who never transgressed

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the Torah or its mitzvos, stand in the same place as the *baal teshuvah*? The Tzaddik is attached to the divine force that gives life to all of creation. But the penitent, who is seeking the way back to Hashem, must attach himself to the primordial will that even preceded Creation, to the spiritual realm of *teshuvah*, also known as the “realm of thought.” (It is said that *teshuvah* was created before the world existed, so *teshuvah* exists in the realm of thought, where the world existed only in potential.) OHEV YISRAEL, BEREISHIS

TESHUVAH BEFORE LEARNING TORAH AND PRAYER

The Apta Rav taught that we can say that the verse “Speak to *Bnei Yisrael* that they should settle down and camp before Pi HaChiros...” (*Shemos* 14:2) is issuing us a directive for all generations. In this *pasuk*, the Torah is guiding us on the proper path of how to conduct ourselves when we sit down to study Torah or prepare for prayer.

First the verse says that he “should settle down and camp” — he should relax his mind so that it is clear and prepared for study or prayer.

The next word of the verse, “before,” can be understood to mean that he must prepare himself before his Maker, to realize before Whom he is standing, as it is taught, “Know before Whom you are standing [in prayer]” (*Berachos* 28b). Similarly, the Sages taught (*ibid.* 30b) that the pious people of the generation would spend an hour before praying to prepare their minds and direct their thoughts and hearts toward Hashem.

This is how we interpret “They should settle down and camp” —

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they should settle their minds and thoughts — “before Pi HaChiros.” The final words of the verse can be understood to mean “before *pi cheirus* — before they achieve freedom,” before they free their mouths for prayer and study before Hashem.

The *pasuk* can also be translated, “*V’yashuvu...* — They should turn back and camp before Pi HaChiros.” This implies that they should do *teshuvah* before they achieve “freedom for their mouths.” OHEV YISRAEL, BESHALACH

THE CHIEF OF FORGETFULNESS

The Apta Rav taught that the realm of *teshuvah* is so lofty it is beyond the reach of many individuals. How then do we open the gates of *teshuvah*? Through the righteous Tzaddik.

If the Tzaddik is constantly attached to *avodas Hashem* with no interruptions whatsoever, then his very self and his very existence could be nullified because He is attached to Hashem with such fierce love and devotion. In order to keep him alive, Hashem causes the Tzaddik to sometimes falter and fall from this lofty level. This occurs by some foreign or inappropriate thought that clashes with his lofty spiritual level.

But immediately the Tzaddik picks himself back up and repents. He bangs and hammers on the gates of repentance to pry them open so that his *teshuvah* will be accepted on High, so that his mistake will be forgiven and he will be absolved of the sin of transgressing “Be careful lest you forget Hashem...” (*Devarim* 6:12).

Through his *teshuvah*, the Tzaddik also elevates all the mistakes and blemishes the wicked have done and injects the desire for repentance into all the hearts of even those who have fallen into the deepest pits

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of despair. In this way the gates of repentance are opened for everyone through the Tzaddik's forgetfulness.

Such a Tzaddik is nicknamed Menasheh, which connotes "forgetfulness." Since the entire world is elevated through the Tzaddik's forgetfulness and his subsequent *teshuvah*, he is also called "*nasi*" — the uplifted one. This is the implication of the verse "The *nasi* of *Bnei Menasheh*...Gamliel ben Pedahtzur" (*Bamidbar* 7:54). The Tzaddik realizes that this forgetfulness occurs because he has fallen from his lofty level, and he recognizes that as a result, even those who have fallen into the darkest, deepest pits of despair are able to repent and find salvation. In their hearts they can still say, "Gamliel"; that is, "*Gam li E-I* — I, too, still believe in G-d!"

Why is he called "*Ben Pedahtzur* — the Son of Hashem, the Rock and Redeemer"? It is because he knows that he has fallen in order to elevate others back up with him — that because of him, Hashem, who is the "*Tzur*," Rock of Israel, redeems ("*podeh*") them and the sparks of holiness that have fallen into the pits. OHEV YISRAEL, NASO

FOR SOME SINNERS HASHEM OPENS THE GATES

A heavenly voice rang out and proclaimed, "Return, My wayward children — all except for Acher [Elisha ben Avuyah]" (*Chagigah* 15a). This is astonishing. How can this be? We are taught that nothing stands in the way of repentance (see *Talmud Yerushalmi, Pe'ah* 1:5), and even someone as wicked as Menasheh, a king of Yehudah who greatly angered the Creator, was forgiven when he repented (see *Melachim II* 21:1–18; *Divrei HaYamim II* 33:1–9).

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It seems to me that if Acher had done *teshuvah*, Hashem would have accepted his repentance as well. Hashem has compassion over all His creatures, even sinners, and no one is forsaken. Therefore, Hashem sends them pangs of remorse and thoughts of *teshuvah* through the heavenly voice that rings out daily, asking them to repent and return, as we know from the holy writings (the teachings of the Ba'al Shem Tov and his *talmidim*). This awakens them to fully and sincerely repent. Then Hashem Himself opens the gates of *teshuvah* and pleads for each and every individual to repent and return.

For a great sinner, however, Hashem does not lower Himself thus. The sinner is required to awaken himself to repent and take it to heart that he must return without an awakening from on High. He must of his own volition confess before Hashem wholeheartedly and pour out his anguish, begging for heavenly aid to complete his *teshuvah*. Then surely even his *teshuvah* will be accepted, so long as he leaves his wicked ways behind. OHEV YISRAEL, YEMEI HARATZON V'HATESHUVAH

TESHUVAH EVEN FOR THE THREE CARDINAL SINS

The Apta Rav once told a sinner who had transgressed in a grievous way that we see that Hashem never forsakes anyone from a verse in *Eichah*. The verse hints to us that everyone has it in his power to fully repent and start anew. The verse he was referring to is “Return us to You, Hashem, and we will return; renew our days as of old” (*Eichah* 5:21–22).

The word for “old” in the verse is *kedem*, which can be read as an acrostic for the names of three biblical figures: Kayin, David, and Menasheh. Each personality is a symbol of *teshuvah* for one of the three

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cardinal sins: murder, immorality, and idolatry. Kayin was the first murderer in history; he regretted spilling his brother's blood and repented. David repented his relationship with Batsheva. Menasheh, king of Yehudah, did *teshuvah* for his acts of idolatry.

From their example, we see that even someone who sinned against Hashem to such a degree as they did should not give up hope. He should repent and his days will be “renewed as of old” — that is, like “*KeDeM*”: Kayin, David, and Menasheh. YALKUT OHEV YISRAEL

MIRRORED TESHUVAH

Our Sages teach that a person has difficulty seeing his own faults and shortcomings (Mishnah, *Nega'im* 2:5). The Apta Rav concludes that therefore a person should pay attention to the misdeeds and improper actions of other people. He should then ask himself, “Why did Hashem orchestrate events so that I should witness those misdeeds? It must be that Hashem wanted me to see this so that I will realize that I have the same shortcomings, but I am blinded from seeing them by my own evil inclination.” Then he can return to Hashem by doing *teshuvah* over these misdeeds, and Hashem will have mercy on him. OHEV YISRAEL, LIKUTIM CHADASHIM

THE TASTE OF TESHUVAH

The Apta Rav taught that a Tzaddik who was born righteous and never tasted sin cannot possibly condemn evil. How can a person testify regarding something he himself has never experienced?

Someone who was once a sinner and repented can testify that good is truly good and that it is correct to choose the path of good and attach

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oneself to goodness. Only he can give testimony to the nature of evil and its negative affects, only he can convey how disgusted we should be by its loathsome qualities, because he once tasted all the pleasure that the side of evil offers and rejected it. Now his mind is clear and he can see how all the pleasures of this world are nothing; they are false vanities, disgusting, loathsome, and empty.

Our commentators note that only Shlomo HaMelech could truly reject the empty vanities and pleasures of this world and sincerely declare that “*hevel havalim hakol hevel* — falsehood and emptiness, everything is vanity!” (*Koheles* 1:1; see *Ramban* there). This is because he ruled over the entire world and lacked none of the physical pleasures available therein, but nonetheless, with his holy, pure, refined mind he was able to recognize that the pleasures of this world are nothing but false vanities. He alone was capable of testifying to the truth: that this world and its pleasures are empty. OHEV YISRAEL, HAGGADAH

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TEACHINGS *of*
RAV YAAKOV YITZCHAK
HOROWITZ, *the* CHOZEH *of* LUBLIN
ONE OF THE PRIMARY DISCIPLES OF THE REBBE REB MEILECH

THE TZADDIK'S TORAH STUDY
CAUSES OTHERS TO REPENT

The holy Chozeh of Lublin taught that when David HaMelech said, “Happy is he whose strength is in You, those whose hearts focus

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on upward paths” (*Tehillim* 84:6), he meant that when a Tzaddik sits and studies Torah *liShmah*, sincerely for the sake of Hashem, then he moves others to thoughts of repentance. Through his studies, he injects into their hearts the desire and motivation to do *teshuvah*.

This then is how we interpret the *pasuk*: Happy is he, the Tzaddik, whose strength is in You. He attaches himself to You, Hashem, through the Torah, which is called “*oz*” — Your strength — as it says, “Hashem shall give ‘*oz*’ [the Torah] to His people” (*ibid.* 29:11; see *Zevachim* 115a). By the Tzaddik attaching himself to Hashem through the Torah, he “focuses ‘hearts’ on upward paths” — he plows furrows and paths that lead the hearts of the people to *teshuvah*.

Similarly, the Yismach Moshe taught that when David HaMelech sang praises thanking Hashem (*ibid.* 111:1), he was saying that when you praise and thank Hashem, you cause an awakening of *teshuvah* within the hearts of others. ILANA D’CHAYI, EMOR

EVEN ACHER COULD HAVE REPENTED

A heavenly voice rang out and proclaimed, “Return, My wayward children — all except for Acher [Elisha ben Avuyah]” (*Chagigah* 15a). Elisha ben Avuyah, also known as Acher (the “other” one), was an infamous heretic who was denied a portion in the World to Come.

Anyone with any sense, taught the holy Rav Yaakov Yitzchak of Lublin, realizes that if Elisha had responded to the heavenly voice that enjoined him to repent saying, “All the better! Now I can truly serve You sincerely, Hashem, with no thought of any reward and with no

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ulterior motives except to give You satisfaction and *nachas* because I am fulfilling Your will,” he would have achieved full atonement. He would have been completely forgiven and attained a lofty spiritual level. AGRA D’PIRKA

THE REAL SIN OF THE CALF

Once, Rav Shraga Feivel of Gritza, the ancestor of the Rebbes who would one day establish the Alexander Dynasty, visited the Chozeh of Lublin. The Chozeh said, “Feivele, do you know what the sin of the golden calf was?” Reb Feivel answered that *Bnei Yisrael* had made a graven image and bowed to it and declared it their leader.

“You are mistaken,” said the Lubliner. “Their primary sin was that ‘they mourned’ (*Shemos* 33:4). They became sad and morose and fell into a depression after they sinned. They did not realize that they should have seized the opportunity and repented with joy in their hearts!” TIFERES YISRAEL

TESHUVAH BEFORE STUDY

A wicked person who doesn’t abandon his evil ways and repent is forbidden to study Torah... Regarding him the verse states, “To the wicked Hashem says, ‘What do you want with My book of laws?’” (*Tehillim* 50:16).

If, however, he repents before he begins learning Torah, then he merits to study with fear and awe on the level of *Bnei Yisrael* when they received the Torah on Mount Sinai. MA’OR VASHEMESH

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV KLONYMOUS KALMAN EPSTEIN OF KRAKOW

ONE OF THE PRIMARY DISCIPLES OF THE REBBE
REB MEILECH AND THE CHOZEH OF LUBLIN, AND
THE AUTHOR OF *MA'OR VASHEMESH*

IN THE FUTURE

Rav Klonymous Kalman once heard from his Rebbe, the Chozeh of Lublin, that the reason that the divine Name Ehey-eh, which literally means “I shall be,” is in the future tense is that it is associated with *teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* is characterized by the improvement one intends to make in the future: “From now on *I shall be* a true servant of Hashem” and “From now on *I shall* rectify my misdeeds.” *MA'OR VASHEMESH*

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV MENDEL *of* RIMANOV ONE OF THE PRIMARY DISCIPLES OF THE REBBE REB MEILECH

WHY DOES HASHEM DO TESHUVAH?

Rav Mendel Rimanover taught that *teshuvah* is about “returning” — that you must return to the place you came from. That is, you need to revert to your previous level before you sinned and attach yourself to the Source of all life. You must pierce through all the barriers that

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separate you from Hashem, as it says, “Your iniquities have separated you from your G-d” (*Yeshayahu* 59:2), because they prevent you from fulfilling the will of your Creator...

Chazal say that Hashem also does *teshuvah* (*Zohar*, *Vayikra* 21a), citing as proof the verse “Hashem will return...” (*Devarim* 30:3). What does this mean? How would Hashem do *teshuvah*, since He does not sin? Sin has nothing to do with Him, Heaven forbid! Chazal teach (*Sukkah* 52b) that Hashem regrets that He created the evil inclination. This regret is Hashem’s *teshuvah*. But this in itself is puzzling. Hashem knows the future. Why did He do something that He would later regret?

The answer is that it is very difficult for us to do *teshuvah*. In order to make it easier for us, because Hashem has mercy and kindness and wishes that the wicked would repent and return to Him, He was the first to repent and regret (essentially creating the idea of *teshuvah*). Since Hashem did *teshuvah* first, and gave it existence, it is now easier for us to do so. KUNTRES MENACHEM TZION, VAYEILECH

HASHEM’S REGRET CARVES OUT A PATH FOR REPENTANCE

RAV Menachem Mendel of Rimanov explained that without regret the world could not exist, and therefore Hashem had to make room, so to speak, for *teshuvah*, so that the world could be rectified through repentance. This is the meaning of our Sages’ statement that Hashem has “*charatah*” over creating the evil inclination (*Sukkah* 52b). *Charatah* is usually translated as “regret,” but it can also mean “carve out.” Hashem carved out a path for regret and repentance in the heavens in order to counter the evil inclination. EMES L’YAAKOV, LIKUTIM

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HOW TO OBSERVE SHABBOS: THROUGH TESHUVAH ON EREV SHABBOS

Every *erev Shabbos* a person should review his actions and repent in order to rectify any blemishes he caused during the week. Each day of the week corresponds to a specific *sefirah*, supernal attribute, and if one sins on that day he causes a blemish in that attribute. On the sixth day he must rectify all of them in order to enter Shabbos, which corresponds to the seventh attribute, through repentance.

Shabbos not only corresponds to the seventh *sefirah*, but it encompasses all of the *sefiros*, all seven supernal attributes. Since the letters of *Shabbos* also spell *tashuv*, “repent,” it is through *teshuvah* that one can rectify the attributes that were blemished during the other six days of the week and observe Shabbos properly. In other words, through proper preparation on *erev Shabbos* — by fully and sincerely repenting — one can fulfill the mitzvah of observing Shabbos itself. ILANA D’CHAYI

NOTHING STANDS IN THE WAY OF TESHUVAH

Rav Mendel of Rimanov once asked: If nothing stands in the way of *teshuvah*, how can it be that if two witnesses testify before the Sanhedrin that someone committed a murder, he can be found guilty and put to death? Why don’t we consider the possibility that he repented?

You might say that according to the law, their testimony is accepted only if they have warned the perpetrator of the penalty for his crime; his defiance of their warning proves his guilt and lack of remorse. Still, I say that we should consider the possibility that he might yet regret his actions and repent.

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This is why the witnesses underwent seven forms of interrogation to corroborate their testimony. During this intensive corroboration, the judges sitting on the Sanhedrin did their best to infuse the accused with feelings of remorse so that he would do *teshuvah*. His *teshuvah* would cause the witnesses to become confused and fail to corroborate their testimony, and he would then go free.

This was the *avodah* of the righteous Tzaddikim who sat on the Sanhedrin — to cause the accused to do *teshuvah* so that he would be saved.

And this is the meaning of the statement of Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiva that had they served on the Sanhedrin, no one would have ever been sentenced to the death penalty (*Makkos* 7a). Since they were great Tzaddikim, they had the power to rectify Jewish souls and cause them to do *teshuvah*, so they would have succeeded in bringing any accused murderer standing trial to repent. This would have caused the witnesses to become confused, and the accused would have gone free. IMREI YOSEF

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV TZVI HIRSCH HAKOHEN *of* RIMANOV ALSO KNOWN AS REB HIRSCH MESHARES, THE SUCCESSOR OF RAV MENDEL OF RIMANOV

THE VICTORY OF THE BA'AL TESHUVAH

Our Sages taught that “in the place where *ba'alei teshuvah* stand, even the righteous cannot stand” (*Berachos* 34b). Through the

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process of *teshuvah*, the bleaching of sins, the love between the penitent and Hashem grows greater.

Take two people who were once friends and now hate one another for some reason. After they make up and resolve their differences, their love is even stronger. The victory of the *baal teshuvah* over his opponent, the evil inclination, who was his enemy from the start, evokes an even more intense emotion. The joy of a *baal teshuvah* is much stronger than the happiness of a Tzaddik who never sinned, because the Tzaddik never had to wage this war. Since he has never fought this battle, he does not know the sweet taste of victory.

The *baal teshuvah*'s joy at being victorious over the evil inclination awakens the same "feeling," so to speak, on High. As our Sages teach, it says in the verses, "Hashem is your Guardian, Hashem is your protective shadow..." (*Tehillim* 121:5) and "Hashem is the mighty warrior who saves, and then He rejoices..." (*Tzefaniah* 3:17), and "Hashem is a 'Man of war' (*Shemos* 15:3). Just as the *baal teshuvah* feels joy from his victory over the evil inclination, so does Hashem rejoice when good prevails. This feeling of joy is awakened when a person battles with his enemy, the evil inclination, and emerges victorious. BE'EROS HAMAYIM

A SOLDIER'S REGRET

Once, a Jewish soldier who had been conscripted into the czar's army under duress many years before entered the shul of Rav Hirsch of Rimanov. When he heard the Tzaddik's heartfelt prayers and set eyes on his holy visage, pangs of remorse seized him, and he felt an intense, fierce desire for *teshuvah*. He cried bitterly, recalling how he had been living among the gentiles as one of them, eating nonkosher

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food and desecrating the holy Shabbos.

He kept crying, wallowing in his anguish and regret, until Rav Hirsch remarked, “In Heaven it is said that it was worth it for you to have suffered all those terrible sins that you did under duress just so you could have such a genuine feeling of remorse and do a sincere *teshuvah* such as this.” KUNTRES MENACHEM TZION

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV NAFTALI HOROWITZ *of* ROPSHITZ A DISCIPLE OF THE REBBE REB MEILECH AND THE AUTHOR OF *ZERA KODESH*

THE EXILED WILL

Why is remorse the vehicle for *teshuvah*? It is because *teshuvah* means “return.” To what does one return?

All forms of sin stem from a person’s will and desires; all actions stem from one’s desire to perform that action. All will ultimately stems from the supernal divine will. When a person sins, by desiring to do something sinful, he is channeling the human will, whose root is in the Supernal Will, away from its purpose toward something that Hashem finds undesirable. In effect, he is exiling Hashem and His will to a place where they do not belong, because now the Supernal Will is being channeled into the negative desire for sin.

When a person feels remorse for what he did, and shows a desire for *teshuvah*, he restores his will to its intended purpose and rechannels the

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Supernal Will, releasing it from exile. This is why remorse is the vehicle for *teshuvah*; and this is what it means to “return” — to return the will to what it is meant to be used for. ZERA KODESH, CHUKAS

TESHUVAH REFLECTED ON HIGH

When a person repents and does *teshuvah* over his misdeeds, he causes the same thing to happen on High, because, as we know, whatever actions we do down here are reflected Above. This is how our Sages interpret the verse “Hashem is your shadow” (*Tehillim* 121:5): just as your shadow imitates you and does whatever you do, Hashem shadows your actions, so to speak, and “does” whatever you do. When you repent, you cause Hashem to repent on High, and he regrets that He ever created the evil inclination, as our Sages taught (*Berachos* 32a). This can be illustrated with a parable:

A father once gave his son a pocketknife. The child was not careful with the gift; he didn’t put it away properly in its sheath and ended up cutting himself. Witnessing his son’s pain, the father felt doubly anguished. He was troubled over his son’s pain, but he was even more deeply bothered by the fact that it was his own gift that caused his son to injure himself, even though he did not intend that should get his son hurt.

Similarly, Hashem created the evil inclination for our benefit. It is our job to harness it and to sheath the passions and desires that it provokes in us, and in that way benefit from it. However, man does not do this. Instead he gives his evil inclination *more* rein and ends up ruining himself. When we repent and regret our sins, Hashem regrets the creation of the evil inclination, so to speak, because He sees the pain

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and anguish it causes us. When Hashem regrets the creation of the evil inclination, it saps the evil inclination of its strength and nullifies its power.

Therefore, when we repent, we cause Hashem to regret creating the *yetzer hara*, which weakens it and hastens our redemption from the evil inclination. ZERA KODESH, NITZAVIM

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV MOSHE TEITELBAUM *of* UJHEL THE FOUNDER OF THE SATMAR DYNASTY AND THE AUTHOR OF *YISMACH MOSHE*

SIN NOW AND REPENT LATER?

The Gemara teaches, “Whoever says, ‘I will sin now and repent later,’ is held back and prevented from repenting” (*Yoma* 87a).

The Yismach Moshe explained that no one is saying that *teshuvah* doesn’t work for someone who says he will sin and repent later, but rather that nothing he does helps him do *teshuvah*. In truth, nothing stands in the way of *teshuvah* (*Yerushalmi, Pe'ah* 1:1), but in this case, such a person does not really end up doing *teshuvah*.

The primary aspect of *teshuvah* is the regret and remorse one feels for having done something wrong. But if someone decides beforehand that he will sin now and later repent, he cannot by definition regret the very action that he planned to do ahead of time.

If he somehow manages to regret this whole premeditated plan,

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then his *teshuvah* will be accepted. But in all probability, the regular *teshuvah* will not be enough; simply repenting and regretting the sinful act alone will not suffice. Such a person would probably plan ahead and realize that he might regret his whole plan. Such regret will not be effective as *teshuvah*, since it will not be genuine. This cycle can repeat itself ad infinitum, and this is why such a person is held back and incapable of doing *teshuvah*. It is because his *teshuvah* is never enough and his regret is never sincere. YISMACH MOSHE, NASO

TESHUVAH — A MITZVAH?

Many ask why we were not commanded explicitly in the Torah to do *teshuvah*. The Yismach Moshe answered that if there were a written commandment to do *teshuvah*, it might seem that just as *teshuvah* is mandated, its acceptance is also required by the law of the Torah. The truth is, however, that it is accepted only because of Hashem's merciful kindness. YISMACH MOSHE, BEREISHIS

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV MORDECHAI *of* LECHOVITCH FOREFATHER OF THE SLONIMER DYNASTY

SMALL STEPS ON THE JOURNEY OF TESHUVAH

The *Navi* says, "Return to Me [says Hashem], and I will return to you" (*Malachi* 3:7). There was once a prince who was captured by a band

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of cutthroat thieves, and they took him so far away from his father the king that if he tried to walk home, it would take him ages to arrive. The king sent messengers to tell his son the prince that he was awaiting his return.

“If you do not begin your journey,” he wrote, “then the king can’t draw closer to you either.” The prince had to take the first step and set out on the journey, even though his steps might have seemed small and insignificant, and it might have seemed that he was not getting anywhere. But if he would start out, then the king would come toward him, taking long, powerful strides, and then surely they would be reunited very soon.

This is what the verse means: “Return to Me,” even if means taking small steps, “and I will return to you” — and I will return with abundant mercy. TORAS AVOS, TESHUVAH

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV NOACH *of* LECHOVITCH SON AND SUCCESSOR OF RAV MORDECHAI OF LECHOVITCH

THE BROKENHEARTED SINNER

Once, Rav Noach was in the company of his father’s disciple, Rav Michele, when someone asked, “Who is preferable: a sinful man who actually sins yet deep inside he is heartbroken over his misdeeds, recognizing how low he has fallen, or someone who does not actually sin, but his mind is full of bad thoughts while he considers himself a Tzaddik?”

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They debated and agreed that they preferred the brokenhearted sinner. At least in the end he decides to repent and do *teshuvah*, whereas the other, delusional fellow will never do so. TORAS AVOS, TESHUVAH

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV MOSHE KOBRINER ONE OF THE PRIMARY DISCIPLES OF RAV MORDECHAI OF LECHOVITCH

SO CLOSE YET SO FAR

Regarding the verse “Call out to Hashem when He is close” (*Yeshayahu* 55:6), Rav Moshe Kобрiner asked, “Don’t we call out to someone when they are far away? Why do we need to call out to Hashem if He is close?”

He answered, “You should know that even if you feel far from Hashem, *He* is close to you. And although He is close to you, you are nonetheless still very far from Him — from truly serving Him as you should.” TORAS AVOS, TESHUVAH

A GOOD FRIEND

Regarding the verse “Let the wicked person abandon his ways, and the iniquitous man his twisted thoughts, and let him return to Hashem” (*Yeshayahu* 55:7), Rav Moshe Kобрiner explained that a wicked person should do *teshuvah* by distancing himself from grievous

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sins and transgressions. An “*ish*,” a man — that is, a Tzaddik — should begin his path of *teshuvah* by working on his thoughts, by taking the inner path to perfection.

The words “let him return to Hashem” connote returning with the help of a good friend. Only through the help of a good friend who truly loves and cares about you can you truly repent and do *teshuvah*. IMROS MOSHE

FINDING THE STRENGTH WITHIN YOURSELF

Based on the verse “As for you, you shall repent through G-d” (*Hosea* 12:7), Rav Moshe Koberner taught, “No one is asking the impossible of you. Rather, repent through the G-d within you — find the G-dliness within yourself, and this will help you return to Hashem.” IMROS MOSHE

THE DAYS DEMAND TESHUVAH

“Days shall speak,” it says in *Iyov* (32:7). Rav Moshe Koberner said that each passing day speaks and demands repentance. As we look at all the days of our life that have passed, it is as if they are saying to us, “See how much time has passed, and still you have not done *teshuvah*!” IMROS MOSHE

BACK TO HIS PARENTS

Rav Moshe Koberner once remarked that one who can't bring himself to pour out his soul before his Maker in prayer, even after committing grievous sins, has not yet learned to act like a child return-

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ing to his father's loving embrace even after he has made a mistake. Such a person therefore has not yet even stepped over the threshold of the path of Chassidus. TORAS AVOS

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV AVRAHAM *of* SLONIM A DISCIPLE OF RAV NOACH OF LECHOVITCH AND RAV MOSHE OF KOBRIN AND THE AUTHOR OF *YESOD HA'AVODAH*

SEEING THE LIGHT

Sometimes, when a person does a mitzvah, he does not feel invigorated from it at all. Most probably, his soul feels the light of the mitzvah at its roots, but his coarse, thick physical form, which acts as a barrier preventing him from this experience, prevents any light from penetrating to his heart and mind.

But when a person repents, he removes all the barriers that divide his soul and body, and then the light and vitality of the mitzvos can reach him. TORAS AVOS, TESHUVAH

FULL OF THEMSELVES

Our Sages teach that the sinners of *Klal Yisrael* are full of regret and full of mitzvos (*Eiruvin* 19a). "If this is true," said Rav Avraham of Slonim, "and they are full of regret and full of mitzvos, why does the Gemara call them '*poshim*,' criminals?"

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He answered that this is their problem. They are so full of regret and so full of mitzvos that when they pray and cry tears, they consider themselves true *baalei teshuvah*, when in reality they are so full of themselves that there is no room left for them to improve. TORAS AVOS, TESHUVAH

FATTENED GEESE

Rav Avraham of Slonim once asked why the evil inclination allows sinners to be full of regret. Why give them the desire for *teshuvah*? He answered with a parable:

How do you fatten geese? You starve them first. When they start to eat, they are ravenous and overeat so much that they grow fat.

The same is true of the passion for sin. As the verse in *Mishlei* (9:17) teaches us, “Stolen waters taste sweeter” — forbidden acts give a person pleasure. The evil inclination fears that if he allows us to sin continuously without any pangs of conscience or regret, we will get so used to sin that it will lose its appeal. So he allows us to pause and regret our misdeeds and realize their sinful nature. This gives us a renewed desire for sin so that we wish to taste its flavor anew. In this way, the evil inclination causes us to pursue the pleasure of sin. TORAS AVOS, TESHUVAH

LIKE A NEWBORN INFANT

“**H**ashem said to me, ‘You are My child. Today I have given birth to you’” (*Tehillim* 2:7). Hashem said, “How can you merit the title of ‘My child’? If you repent.” Then you will be transformed into a new creation, like an infant newly born. TORAS AVOS, TESHUVAH

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TESHUVAH THAT ORIGINATES IN DA'AS

Our Sages taught (*Kiddushin* 49b) that if a woman was betrothed to someone on the condition that he was a Tzaddik and later they discovered that he was actually wicked, this is not grounds to dissolve the betrothal. They are still considered betrothed, because there is the slightest doubt regarding his status: perhaps he had thoughts of sincere repentance when they were betrothed. Many ask how mere thoughts of *teshuvah*, with no accompanying action, can rectify all of this wicked man's sins.

Rav Avraham of Slonim explained that the Sages' wording is very precise. They said that he must have had thoughts of *teshuvah* in his "da'as." *Chochmah*, wisdom, is seated in the brain, and *binah*, insight, is housed in the heart. One has *da'as* when *chochmah* and *binah* come together — it connects the heart and mind, merging them as one. The person's *teshuvah* is so genuine that it originates in his *da'as*, encompassing his entire being. Such *teshuvah* transforms a person, and he can legitimately be called a Tzaddik. TORAS AVOS, TESHUVAH

TESHUVAH IN HAPPINESS

There is a form of *teshuvah* that even the angels themselves, let alone the evil inclination, do not recognize. If a person begins to fear that he will fall into despondency and despair because he is feeling bitter, and then he makes an effort to be happy and recognize Hashem's kindness and trust in Him, the angels are dumbfounded by this.

They can't understand a *teshuvah* that is not accompanied by feelings of lowliness and self-subjugation. Hashem, however, sees into the deepest depths of the heart and recognizes the purpose of the joy: to

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mask any bitterness he feels that might only lead him to despair. In essence, he has clothed his feelings of subjugation and lowliness in joy so that he will be able to do *teshuvah*. TORAS AVOS, TESHUVAH

THE VALUE OF HAPPINESS

Our Sages taught, “If one did many, many sins, he should do many, many mitzvos to counter them” (*Vayikra Rabbah* 21:5). Rav Avraham of Slonim added in the name of the Reishis Chochmah that one mitzvah done out of joy is equal to a thousand mitzvos. If we awaken ourselves to study Torah and perform mitzvos in joy, we will merit to have done many, many mitzvos easily. TORAS AVOS, TESHUVAH

TESHUVAH OUT OF LOVE: PRECIOUS TO HASHEM

The final three letters of the word *teshuvah* equal the *gematria* of *ahavah*, “love” (*vav* equals 6, *beis* is 2, and *hei* is 5, which equals 13). This teaches that the end of *teshuvah* is the beginning of serving Hashem out of love and joy. Even if you don’t merit to do complete *teshuvah*, but you feel just a pang of regret felt out of love, this is more precious to Hashem than *teshuvah* done out of fear. TORAS AVOS, TESHUVAH

THE SECRET PASSAGEWAY BENEATH HASHEM’S THRONE

Our Sages taught (*Sanhedrin* 103a) that when you do *teshuvah*, Hashem burrows beneath His Throne of Glory to create a secret passage through which the *baal teshuvah* can enter and Hashem can receive him. Rav Avraham of Slonim explained the reason for this:

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The angels are perplexed by Hashem's great love for *Bnei Yisrael*. They can't understand why He forgives them even after they have sinned and rebelled against Him.

Since the angels may come to accuse the *ba'âl teshuvah* and prosecute him for his sins, Hashem digs a secret tunnel for him and opens a new opening for him to enter that even the prosecuting angels are unaware of. This prevents them from recognizing the *ba'âl teshuvah* and allows him to return to Hashem without obstacles. TORAS AVOS, TESHUVAH

GETTING OUT OF THE MUD STEP BY STEP

Reb Yisrael of Shorshov, one of Rav Avraham's chassidim, came to the Rebbe heartbroken. The disciple poured out his heart's troubles before his Rebbe, crying that although he spent all of his days repenting, he felt no change for the better.

"Rebbe," he said, "what should I do? I'm still in the same place today that I was yesterday!"

Rav Avraham answered him with a parable:

There was once a man who was stuck in the mud. Struggling to extricate himself, he lifted his feet and tried to walk toward dry land. But with each agonizing step, his feet only sank back into the mire. Still, he did not give up. Although with each step he took, his feet sank back into the mud, he knew that each step drew him closer and closer to the dry land, and each step was essential to getting him there. It is the same with *teshuvah*: each step is essential to reaching the final goal, even if it seems like you are not getting anywhere. TORAS AVOS, TESHUVAH

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SHARING THE INFINITE ROYAL FEAST

A king once prepared a lavish banquet fit for royalty. After all of his ministers and servants had eaten and drunk their fill, there still remained enough leftovers for an entire feast.

The entire kingdom was invited to come and partake of the meal, yet still there was food left over. It was not befitting the king's honor that so much food go to waste, so they even invited all the prisoners who were sitting in jail, even the criminals who had been disloyal to the king and rebelled against him. All were invited to partake of the king's feast.

Rav Avraham of Slonim related this parable to illustrate the verse "Forgive my sin, for it is great" (*Tehillim* 25:11). Your attribute of mercy and kindness is vast and infinite, because just as Hashem is infinite, so is His compassion. I ask of You, please forgive my sin — allow Your limitless compassion to extend even over my "great sin" as well. TORAS AVOS, TESHUVAH

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TEACHINGS *of*
RAV MOSHE MIDNER (MINDER)
of SLONIM-BARANOWITZ
A GRANDSON OF THE YESOD HA'AVODAH, A DISCIPLE OF RAV
CHAIM BRISKER, AND MASHGIACH OF YESHIVAS TORAS CHESED

STARVING THE BODY

Someone who fasts but fails to do *teshuvah* and subjugate his heart and soul to Hashem can be compared to a king's servant who

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was dispatched on a mission while mounted on horseback. When he reached a shaded grove and needed to rest a bit, the servant tied up the horse but failed to feed him, while he went off and got drunk and failed to fulfill his mission.

The servant is compared to the soul and the horse to the body. A person may have fasted, and did not feed the body, but he failed to fulfill his “mission” to repent. TORAS AVOS, TESHUVAH

THE TRUE JOY OF TESHUVAH

T*eshuvah* must be done out of joy and happiness in serving Hashem. This can be illustrated with a parable:

There were once two brother princes who ran away from home and joined a band of roving brigands. But the day came when they had had enough of the criminal life and grew homesick. They returned home and begged their father the king to take them back. But the king kept his distance and indicated that he was not yet ready to accept them back.

The brothers surmised that their father suspected that they had not totally relinquished their wandering ways. Perhaps, worried the king, they will remember the pleasure they found as fugitives and leave me once again, because they no longer delight in the royal life and bask in the pleasures of the king's court.

What did they do? They consciously opened their hearts to the pure pleasure and joy of living as royalty once again and basking in the king's presence, until the king saw that they were sincerely happy to be back with him again. He drew them close to him once more, knowing that now that they genuinely felt great joy in their present life and would never wish to run away again. TORAS AVOS, TESHUVAH

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THE LOVE THAT COVERS UP CRIMES

A verse in *Mishlei* (10:12) declares that “love covers up all crimes.” When a person sins and commits crimes against Hashem, he must cover up the stench of his filth. How can he do so?

Only with love can he cover it up, and only then can he return to Hashem.

Rav Moshe Midner compared this to a king who notified his subjects that he was traveling out to the countryside to meet them. Immediately they set about preparing their simple country homes for a royal visit, and they began to clean up all the waste and dirt. As each one swept and gathered in the waste, piles of garbage began to accumulate. A foul stench wafted from the piles of garbage until it became unbearable.

When the king came, he was struck by the putrid odor. It was too strong and he could not stand it, but there was nowhere he could go to avoid it; it was everywhere.

One man, out of his love for the king and his desire to host him, covered up the waste he had gathered with pure, clean sand. As he poured the sand over the pile of garbage in his home, the king chanced by. Here, finally, was a place that was neither dirty nor odorous. The king had finally found a place where he could reside during his visit.

The pure, clean sand represents the great love and joy we feel when we do mitzvos. This covers up any negative attributes that prevents a person from attaching himself to the King, Hashem. This is the meaning of “Love covers up all crimes,” and in this way a person can come to true *teshuvah*. TORAS AVOS, TESHUVAH

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I WOULD HAVE COME HOME SOONER

There was once a prince who behaved badly and was banished from his father's kingdom. In exile, he took up with a group of lowlifes until he became indistinguishable from them — nothing more than a course ruffian. Still, he had good roots — after all, he was a prince born of noble blood, and the day came when the prince regretted his mistakes. He decided to escape from the brigands and return to his father.

The king welcomed him warmly with love and affection. When he saw how his father greeted him, the prince cried bitter tears.

“Why are you crying, my dear son?” asked the king. “Did you not escape from the lowest, most despicable of places, and now you sit here in my royal palace? What is there to be sad about?”

“That is exactly why I am crying,” said the prince. “I never realized how much you love me and how merciful you are. If I had known then what I know now, I would have returned so much sooner!” TORAS AVOS, TESHUVAH

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TEACHINGS *of* *the* YID HAKADOSH *of* PESHISCHA

RAV YAAKOV YITZCHAK, THE “HOLY JEW,”
A DISCIPLE OF THE CHOZEH OF LUBLIN

EVERY DAY A NEW JEW

They say that the Yid HaKadosh of Peshischa was called by this name, the “Holy Jew,” because he rose to such spiritual heights

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that each and every day of his life, it was as if he had transformed himself from the level of a non-Jew to that of a Jew. SFAS EMES, BAMIDBAR

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV SIMCHA BUNIM *of* PESHISCHA THE PRIMARY DISCIPLE OF THE YID HAKADOSH AND HIS SUCCESSOR

BATTERED AND BROKEN FROM HEAD TO TOE

Rav Simcha Bunim of Peshischa would say that at first glance *teshuvah* seems so easy because a fleeting thought of repentance is considered *teshuvah* by the Torah. But true *teshuvah* is a process that includes a broken heart and a shattered soul, to the extent that someone who has done *teshuvah* properly can be compared to one who fell off a roof and broke all his bones from head to toe. RAMASAYIM TZOFIM

LOST IN THE FOREST

The Baal Shem Tov taught that our thoughts of repentance and feelings of remorse actually originate from a *bas kol*, heavenly voice, that calls to us daily to repent (see *Avos* 6:2). Rav Simcha Bunim illustrated this idea with a parable:

A father and son were traveling together in a coach laden with wares they planned to sell at the annual spring fair. They passed through a

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forest, and the young boy, seeing the beautiful spring blossoms around, declared, “Father, please allow me to stop here and pick some of these beautiful flowers!”

The father shook his head and said, “No, my son. If you stop to pick the flowers while I continue onward, you may not be able to catch up and you will get lost.”

“Please, Father, I will pick flowers slowly, and as you travel on I will call out to you. As long as you answer me and I hear your voice, I will know your location. Then all I need to do is to travel in the direction of your voice, and I will not lose my way. Once I have picked enough flowers, I can catch up to you and we will travel on together.”

The father agreed, and the son alighted from the wagon to pick flowers while his father continued onward. Soon the father called out to his son, “My son, my son!” But there was no answer. The father covered his face with his hands in despair and said, “It would have been fine if you had heard my voice. Then you could follow my voice and it would have been all right! But if you don’t even hear my voice, you have likely lost your way!” SIACH SARFEI KODESH, TESHUVAH

TRUE TESHUVAH

Rav Simcha Bunim of Peshischa once observed a certain merchant loading his wares onto a raft to float them on the river’s currents to their destination. Something went wrong, and the entire load sank. The man’s distress at the loss of his merchandise was so great that he broke down and died on the spot! Rav Simcha Bunim declared, “This is how *teshuvah* is done!” SIACH SARFEI KODESH, TESHUVAH

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THE REAL SIN

Rav Simcha Bunim once taught that an act of sin itself is not as bad as we think. At the time that the person commits the infraction, he undergoes a very difficult trial and is tested, but he does not have enough willpower to overcome his inclination and prevail. The real grievous sin, the true terrible transgression, is when a person has the opportunity to repent at each and every moment of each and every day and fails to do so! This sin is much worse than the original infraction. SIACH SARFEI KODESH, TESHUVAH

THE FARMER'S MESSAGE

Before he became a Rebbe, Rav Simcha Bunim was a merchant. He was once in the marketplace buying grain. He haggled and bargained with a Polish farmer over the price of the grain, but the farmer stood his ground and only raised the price. “*Poprowice*,” he told Rav Simcha Bunim — “Do better” in Polish. Although the farmer only meant that he wanted Rav Simcha Bunim to pay him more money, the farmer’s words rang in Rav Simcha Bunim’s ears even after he had returned home that night. *Poprowice!* Improve! Do better!

The Tzaddik took these words to heart. See, even the farmer is telling you to improve, he said to himself, and he resolved then and there to better himself. “Surely now is the time to do *teshuvah!*” he declared. SIACH SARFEI KODESH, TESHUVAH

A GAME OF CHESS

When Rav Simcha Bunim was a merchant before he became a Rebbe, he often engaged some of his fellow Jewish merchants,

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who had strayed from *Yiddishkeit*, in a game of chess. He would use this opportunity to sneak in some remark that would help them mend their wayward ways.

Once, he was playing chess when he made an illegal move. His opponent complained that the move was against the rules of the game.

Rav Simcha Bunim apologized profusely and begged his opponent's forgiveness. "I am sorry I made a mistake. Please forgive me this one time and allow me to redo my move."

His opponent conceded and agreed to allow Rav Simcha Bunim to make a different move since this was the first time he had made such a mistake.

They continued playing until once again Rav Simcha Bunim made an illegal move. Again his opponent caught him and berated him, castigating Rav Simcha Bunim for the illegal move. Once again Rav Simcha Bunim apologized and asked his opponent to forgive his mistake and allow him to redo his move.

This time, however, his opponent refused. The first time he was willing to overlook the mistake, but he would not give Rav Simcha Bunim a second chance.

Rav Simcha Bunim now spoke up and said, "See how a person can make such a bad mistake and go so far down the wrong path that now nothing can help him return? If things go too far, he can never go back to correct his mistake and do it right!"

The words penetrated the merchant's heart. He repented while he still had a chance to "redo his moves" and became a complete *ba'al teshuvah*. SIACH SARFEI KODESH, TESHUVAH

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TEACHINGS *of*
RAV MENACHEM MENDEL
MORGENSZTERN *of* KOTZK
BETTER KNOWN AS THE KOTZKER REBBE, ONE OF THE
PRIMARY DISCIPLES OF RAV SIMCHA BUNIM OF PESHISCHA

NO GREATER AFFLICTION THAN TORAH

Better to be bound and subjugated to Torah study than to fasts, self-affliction, and self-mortification, as the great Kotzker Rebbe taught, “Whoever treads the path of Torah has performed the greatest form of bodily affliction that one could possibly do.” Harnessing yourself to Torah and bearing its yoke on your shoulders, whether by studying it or by diminishing your other pursuits to conform to the Torah’s dictates, is more beneficial than any form of bodily affliction. SHEM MISHMUEL, VAYECHI

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TEACHINGS *of*
RAV YITZCHAK MEIR ALTER
A DISCIPLE OF THE KOTZKER REBBE, THE FOUNDER OF THE
GERRER DYNASTY, AND THE AUTHOR OF *CHIDDUSHEI HARIM*

THE ONE WHO REMAINED BEHIND

The Midrash in *Koheles Rabbah* (ch. 7) relates the following story:
Ten prisoners languished in the royal dungeon. Their only

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visitors were the guards who delivered their daily portion of beatings. As they lay there dejected, with no hope, one of them discovered a small tool in a forgotten corner of their cell. He picked up the tool and began to dig. Slowly and surely, he chipped away at the wall of the cell until he had created a small opening through which he could escape to freedom.

One night, under the cover of darkness, he, together with eight of the other prisoners, slipped away and ran for his life. Only one prisoner remained behind; he refused to flee with the others. In the morning, when the guards discovered what had happened, they took out their wrath on the hapless prisoner who had not escaped. His beatings were ten times worse than before.

As he cowered before his tormentors, absorbing their harsh blows, he called out in pain, "Why are you punishing me? I did not escape! I remained behind!"

"Exactly," the master of the guards said. "It is for that very reason we are punishing you so!"

The sin that the prisoners were being punished for can be compared to a mistake, explained the Chiddushei HaRim. We all make mistakes; we all make decisions we regret. But the fact that the prisoner who remained behind didn't escape is proof of his brazenness, proof that he does not fear authority. You had the chance to escape? You had the opportunity to get away and you did not? It means you do not fear the punishment. You are not afraid of the king's wrath, and for that you must be ten times punished.

Similarly, if someone keeps making the same mistake and doesn't try to stop, he deserves to be punished for it. **SIACH SARFEI KODESH, TESHUVAH**

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THE PULSE OF A JEW'S HEART

“I am asleep,” says *Shir HaShirim*, “but my heart is awake” (*Shir HaShirim* 5:2). Sometimes we act like sleepers, sleepwalking through our lives, eating, drinking, and living each day without giving much thought to what truly matters. Nonetheless, each and every one of us has a “*kol dodi dofek* — the sound of my beloved knocking” (*ibid.*), a pulse that wakes us up. We are asleep, but not dead because we still have a pulse. That pulsating beat is what gives us life, and it is what gives us the power to move and act.

If you don't feel this “knocking” awakening you, then connect yourself to all of *Klal Yisrael* and to the righteous Tzaddikim, by studying from them and emulating their ways — because the Tzaddik is the pulse of our nation. The Tzaddik acts like the pulse of our hearts, because he prays for our welfare and well-being; as the heart keeps the body alive physically, his prayers keep us alive spiritually. SIACH SARFEI KODESH, TESHUVAH

GET OUT OF THE MUD

Once, before Yom Kippur, the Chiddushei HaRim addressed his chassidim and said to them, “When a person sins and he begins on the path of repentance known as ‘*sur meira*’, turning away from evil, sometimes he spends too much time on *sur meira* — he spends too long going over and over his past misdeeds. He thinks too much and too deeply about the terrible actions he did and how he transgressed.

“Wherever our thoughts are, that is where we find ourselves with all our senses and our entire being. A person who dwells too long on his misdeeds will find it impossible to repent because his heart and his

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mind has become clogged, and he might, Heaven forbid, become despondent and depressed.

“It does not help to remain stuck in the quagmire of ‘*sur meira*.’ You will end up asking yourself, ‘What’s the difference if I sift the mud this way or if I sift the mud that way? It still remains mud!’ What do they gain from such thoughts in Heaven? In the time wasted on such thoughts, one could have been mining for diamonds and precious stones. One could give back something to the heavens on High!

“Therefore, ‘*sur meira*,’ turn away *quickly* from evil — don’t dwell on it too much. Instead, immediately ‘*aseh tov*,’ do good! For ‘if you have done many, many sins, do many, many good deeds instead to counter-act them’ (*Vayikra Rabbah* 21:5).” OHR HANER

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV SHALOM ROKEACH *of* BELZ ALSO KNOWN AS THE “SAR SHALOM” AND A DISCIPLE OF THE CHOZEH OF LUBLIN

CONFESSION ERASES SIN

The Belzer Rebbe once explained that as soon as a person has made up his mind to repent, already sin’s power over him is weakened. Although he still has to act on it, though it is still a mere thought and he has yet to fulfill all the steps of the *teshuvah* process, the mere awakening in his heart to repent makes a great impression even if the sin has not yet been erased.

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But there is an explicit Torah command to make a verbal confession, to admit your transgression specifically with speech and not in thought alone (see *Bamidbar* 5:6–7, according to Rambam, *Hilchos Teshuvah* 1:1). You need to say, “I have sinned and transgressed,” and not just think it in your mind. After deciding in your mind to do *teshuvah*, you need to add the verbal confession, and then you have the power to erase the sin completely so that not even a trace of it remains. Even though the sin’s power weakened upon your decision to repent and it has become faint, an imprint of it remains until the confession erases it. DOVER SHALOM

REMOVING THE STAINS OF SIN

“Cleansed me greatly of my iniquities and purify me of my sins” (*Tehillim* 51:4). Rav Shalom of Belz explained that when a person continuously repents, his soul is “greatly cleansed,” and the stain of sin is no longer discernible. This is what is meant by “Cleansed me greatly of my iniquities” — if You launder my soul, washing me again and again from my iniquities, then You will have “cleansed me greatly” of my sins, because their stains will no longer be seen. IMREI YOSEF, SHEMINI

TWO TYPES OF TESHUVAH

In Belz they would say that there are two types of *teshuvah*. First one must repent over the sins he has done, and then one must repent over the time he wasted sinning that could have been used instead for serving Hashem and elevating himself to the highest heights! SEFER HACHASSIDUS BELZ

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV YEHOSHUA ROKEACH *of* BELZ SON OF RAV SHALOM OF BELZ AND HIS SUCCESSOR

A MASTER OF REPENTANCE

“In the place where *baal teshuvah* stand, even the righteous cannot stand” (*Berachos* 34b). What does it mean to be a “*baal teshuvah*”? It has a similar connotation to “*baal habayis*” — the master of the house. To be master over one’s home is to be called a *baal habayis*. Similarly, a true *baal teshuvah* is someone who has mastered the art of repentance. SEFER HACHASSIDUS BELZ

TESHUVAH TWICE

Rav Yehoshua of Belz used to say that it is necessary to do *teshuvah* twice. When a person first repents, he is so sullied with sin that it is impossible to be happy in such a filthy state. Only after he does *teshuvah* the first time and cleanses himself of his filth can he do *teshuvah* properly — with a merry heart full of joy. B’OHR HACHASSIDUS

THE BELZER REBBE’S INFECTIOUS TESHUVAH

“It happened that one year,” related the son of Rav Baruch Bennett Levenstein, the Rav of Krasna, “on the Shabbos that we read *parashas Bechukosai*, my father was sitting at the *tisch* of Rav Yehoshua of Belz. Many chassidim and distinguished rabbis and scholars from Galicia and Hungary were there, such as Rav Moshe Greenwald, the

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rav of Chust and the author of *Arugas HaBosem*. The Rebbe had not yet entered the room when suddenly everyone present was seized with an intense feeling of remorse and a great desire to repent.

“My father began to weep copious tears. He was embarrassed to be seen sobbing in public with no apparent reason, but when he looked around, he noticed that everyone else was also crying and sobbing. No one knew where this outpouring of emotion was coming from.

“Suddenly the Rebbe entered the room. He seated himself at the head of the table and began to say words of Torah. He said, ‘Young men, rabbis and scholars, you study Gemara and *Shulchan Aruch*, formulate *chiddushim* in Torah and answer questions on the works of the Rambam — yet do you know the words of the *Be’er Heitev*?’

“He repeated the question over and over: ‘Do we know the words of the *Be’er Heitev*?’ Then, with great emotion, he explained himself: ‘The commentary of the *Be’er Heitev* (571:1) teaches that all the mitzvos and good deeds that a person does and any Torah he studies while he is still wicked gives power to the shells and husks of impurity known as the *klippos* — that is, until he repents. Then he can remove his good deeds from their grasp.’

“*Vos zol mein tin?* What should we do? If we learn, it will go to the ‘other side,’ Heaven forbid! If we don’t learn, that, too, is no good. The only answer is to repent the sins of our youth. Only then we will be able to study the holy Torah!’

“Everyone present continued to sob, greatly inspired by the Rebbe’s words. Now they understood what had caused them to cry before the Belzer Rebbe had entered and sat down. It must have been at that moment that the Rebbe had been studying the words of the *Be’er*

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Heitev himself and reflecting on their meaning. As he himself was filled with pangs of repentance, so were all those close to him moved to do *teshuvah*.” KAVANAS HALEV, INTRODUCTION

TESHUVAH UNDER THE COVER OF DARKNESS

Once, a *rav* asked Rav Yehoshua of Belz, who was just a young boy, why we eat *shalosh seudos*, the third meal of Shabbos, in the dark (as was the custom in Belz and other chassidic courts). “It doesn’t make sense,” he told the young lad. “The three meals of Shabbos correspond to the three patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. *Shalosh seudos* corresponds to Yaakov, who was known as the ‘*bechir haAvos*’ (*Bereishis Rabbah* 76:1), the most accomplished and complete of the patriarchs. It should be treated as a joyful, festive occasion held while it is light.”

“You are mistaken,” answered the young Rav Yehoshua. “*Shalosh seudos* is a time of great yearning and an auspicious time for *teshuvah*. When one repents, he cries over his misdeeds. That is why we eat *shalosh seudos* in the dark — so no one can see anyone cry.” SEFER HACHASSIDUS BELZ

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV YISSACHAR DOV ROKEACH *of* BELZ SON OF RAV YEHOSHUA OF BELZ AND HIS SUCCESSOR

NEW GUESTS FOR SHABBOS

Rav Yissachar Dov of Belz used to boast that every Shabbos new guests were welcomed in Belz. One year, when Rosh HaShanah

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immediately preceded Shabbos, Rav Pinchas of Ostila, the Belzer Rav's son-in-law, jokingly asked his father-in-law who were the new guests for Shabbos this time. Obviously no one new had arrived between Rosh HaShanah and Shabbos.

“You are mistaken,” answered Rav Yissachar Dov. “Rosh HaShanah has just passed and everyone here has repented. The process of true *teshuvah* transforms us, and everyone here is a brand-new person. So, as usual, I am right — in Belz there are always new guests on Shabbos!” SEFER HACHASSIDUS BELZ

SINCERE REMORSE AT THE LEIPZIG FAIR

An older chassid once visited Rav Yissachar Dov of Belz and complained that although he had reached a venerable age and felt that Hashem had blessed him in his golden years, he lacked just one thing: true regret for his youthful misdeeds.

“If you sincerely regret your sins,” said the Rebbe, “you will merit forgiveness.”

“How do I measure whether I have enough regret that I have attained atonement?”

Rav Yissachar Dov turned to the chassid and answered, “Let me tell you a story. Once, a merchant arrived a few days early to the annual fair in Leipzig to sell his wares. As he set up his booth, eager tradesmen came to peruse his merchandise and trade with him. Since he had arrived early, he was the only merchant selling such wares at the fair and he could demand high prices.

But the prices were too high, and no one was willing to pay them. Still he stubbornly stuck to his prices, and every day eager buyers passed up

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his inflated prices with disappointment.

“Meanwhile, the weather turned bad. The winds and rain delayed the other merchants, and our eager merchant grew even more stubborn, believing that he was to be the only one offering his merchandise. He raised his already inflated prices even higher.

“The next day the weather cleared up, and the sun came out, and with it, many merchants arrived. They were immediately set upon by the eager buyers, and their merchandise was sold quickly at a good price and handsome profit.”

The Rebbe paused and looked intently at the chassid. “Can you imagine the feelings of remorse that the other merchant had as he stood alone, his wagons full of now unwanted merchandise, while all his customers went elsewhere right in front of his eyes? If your feelings of remorse over your youthful sins and misdeeds equal that merchant’s remorse, then you can be assured of achieving atonement for your sins!” SEFER HACHASSIDUS BELZ

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV YISRAEL *of* RUZHIN A DESCENDANT OF THE MAGGID OF MEZRITCH AND FOUNDER OF THE RUZHINER DYNASTY

JUST ONE MOMENT OF REGRET

“As far as east is from west, He distanced our transgressions from us” (*Tehillim* 103:12). Just as with one move, one can turn

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around to face from east to west, taught Rav Yisrael of Ruzhin, so with just one thought of true regret, a person can distance himself from sin and turn away from wickedness toward righteousness. IRIN KADDISHIN

TESHUVAH TRANSFORMS US

How can *teshuvah* save a person from being punished for his sins? What is the connection between the feelings of regret one has now and his rebellious feelings when he committed those past misdeeds?

When he sinned, he rebelled against Hashem. That act still exists; it still happened. Does the fact that he now confessed and regrets his past actions erase what he did?

We can answer this on the basis of the Sages' statement that "a person sins only if a spirit of folly enters him" (*Sotah* 3a). This spirit actually causes a person's very essence to transform from a human to an animal when he commits the sinful act. Now, when his heart regrets his actions and he repents, his intellectual understanding of what he did wrong causes him to take on the form of a thinking, rational human being once more.

Teshuvah then is a retransformation back to human form. Now standing here is a person as opposed to the animal that sinned before. Why punish a person for the acts of an animal? If anyone should be punished, it should be the animal that committed those sinful acts, but that animal no longer exists.

This is how repentance saves us from punishment, since true regret restores us to our human form. NER YISRAEL, TESHUVAH

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NO DOUBT THAT THEY CAN REPENT

The holy Apta Rav, the author of *Ohev Yisrael*, explained the *mishnah* at the end of tractate *Yoma*, “Whoever says, ‘I will sin now and repent later,’ is held back and prevented from repenting” (*Yoma* 87a), in a unique way. When the Apter Rav passed away, and his soul entered the heavenly realms, he attempted to use his explanation to benefit the poor souls who languished in the fires of Gehinnom because during their lifetime they had in fact said that they would sin now and repent later.

What was his unique explanation?

The Apta Rav explained that the *mishnah* was meant to be read thus: “*Ein mispakin byado*,” usually translated as “He is held back and prevented from repenting,” should really be read as “There is no *safeik*, doubt, that the ability to repent is in his hands.”

The heavenly tribunal argued that since the Tzaddik had departed from the world, he was unable to reinterpret the Torah thus.

Observing this heavenly episode at the time was the holy Ruzhiner, who was seated down here below at his holy Shabbos *tisch*. When the Ruzhiner sensed that the proceedings had turned against the Apta Rav, he himself took up the mission. He expounded on the *mishnah* and interpreted it according to the Apta Rav’s understanding.

Now that a living Tzaddik had taught this novel Torah interpretation, there was no choice. The Tzaddik’s decree was fulfilled, and those souls were rectified and achieved their *tikun*. B’OHR HACHASSIDUS

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV TZVI ELIMELECH SPIRA *of* DINOV A DISCIPLE OF THE CHOZEH OF LUBLIN, RAV OF MUNKACZ AND LATER OF DINOV, AND THE AUTHOR OF *BNEI YISSASCHAR*

TESHUVAH DOES NOT EQUAL SUFFERING

Most people make the mistake of thinking that *teshuvah* means afflicting yourself with various forms of torture and fasting. This is a complete mistake, because this is not mentioned at all in the Torah. The only thing that is mentioned about *teshuvah* is “Return to Hashem, your G-d, and hearken to His voice” (*Devarim* 30:2).

Teshuvah means sincere regret over all the misdeeds you’ve committed until now. You should certainly feel bad that you angered your Creator, who created your soul and spirit. If you are still steeped in any of those sins, disengage from them immediately and resolve that you will never sin again even if you were promised anything in the world to do so. DERECH PEKUDECHA, INTRODUCTION

THE BA’AL TESHUVAH IS A SHAPE-SHIFTER

The Bnei Yissaschar teaches that a sinner is called a beast, as it says, “Man...is compared to beasts” (*Tehillim* 49:13), but when he repents, he transforms himself back into human form.

He cites the Chida, who says that someone once dreamed that he was called a beast. When he sought advice about his disturbing dream, he was told that it was because he had sold a copy of the holy *Zohar*,

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and the word in Hebrew for “beast,” *beheimah*, spells the acrostic “*Biarti hakodesh min habayis* — I have removed all sanctity from my home” (*Devash L’Fi* 2:6).

Similarly, the Bnei Yissaschar continues, a sinner is considered to have removed all sanctity from himself and his home when he sins. Therefore he, too, is called a *beheimah* — a beast. Once sanctity leaves his body, the “other side” takes over. When he repents, he chases out the “other side” and fills himself with sanctity once again. There is no greater transformational act than this. BNEI YISSASCHAR

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TEACHINGS *of* RAV SHLOMO HAKOHEN *of* RADOMSK FOUNDER OF THE RADOMSK DYNASTY AND THE AUTHOR OF *TIFERES SHLOMO*

TESHUVAH B’SIMCHAH

T*eshuvah* is a positive Torah commandment (see Rambam, *Hilchos Teshuvah* 1:1), and therefore, as with all commandments, it must be performed with joy, as it says, “Serve Hashem with joy” (*Tehillim* 100:2). TIFERES SHLOMO, VAYIGASH

TO THE FUTURE

The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 21:6) associates the word, “*v’atah* — from now on” with the process of *teshuvah*. A true penitent must

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say to himself, “From now on, I will repent, I will do *teshuvah* and never go back to my mistakes, and from this day forth, Hashem will bless me.” TIFERES SHLOMO, VAYIGASH

LIKE A BOOK

A person’s life is like a book. His lifetime is like a chronicle of all the days of his life that is read before the King of kings. Therefore we need to review our days and reflect on how we spent our lifetime — what deeds we did, what we have achieved — making sure that we find no blemish in our actions. If we do find any misdeed, then our time should be spent constructively in doing *teshuvah* and good deeds.

This is what our Sages meant when they taught that a person may not allow a Torah scroll to remain in his home if he has not checked it for mistakes (*Kesubos* 19b). On a deeper level, the “*sefer*” in the Sages’ statement refers to the person’s life. A person must review his own chronicles — his Book of Life — and check to see that there are no mistakes written in it.

Similarly, there is a mitzvah to study the Torah day and night (Rambam, *Hilchos Talmud Torah* 1:8, based on *Yehoshua* 1:8). In addition, the halachah says that any mistake found in a *sefer Torah*, even at the very end of that *sefer*, can render the entire Torah scroll unfit. So it is regarding one’s life. Each and every day a person must “study” his life’s chronicles and check it to make sure that he is fit and that it contains no mistakes, for even a mistake that he committed at the end of his life can render his entire lifetime unfit. TIFERES SHLOMO, BESHALACH

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TESHUVAH ON HIGH

When a person feels remorse over his past misdeeds, his repentance awakens a corresponding act of *teshuvah* on High. This is because each mitzvah that we do down here below awakens a similar corresponding mitzvah on High (*Zohar, Vayikra* 31b). For example, our Sages teach (*Berachos* 6a) that Hashem Himself dons tefillin, and this is true for all the mitzvos.

This is the deeper meaning of the statement in *Avos* that “the reward for a mitzvah is a mitzvah” (*Avos* 4:2). This refers to the mitzvah that is done on High, that was a result of a mitzvah done down here below.

Similarly, when a person has remorse and repents down here, he awakens a corresponding act of *teshuvah* on High: Hashem has remorse over having created the evil inclination. This leads to Him giving *Klal Yisrael* the benefit of the doubt, because when they sinned it was the evil inclination’s fault for tempting them. Now that they have repented, Hashem sees that they did not really want to sin and regrets having created the evil urge. TIFERES SHLOMO, KI SISSA