

## Return! A Survey of Al Hateshuva – Turning Evil Into Goodness #4

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

According to Torah law, thinking has no halachic significance. For an act to carry validity, Halacha requires something concrete like words or an action. The thinking involved in teshuva must turn into something real, and words are the realization of that. Thus viduy, the confession of a sinner culminates, concretizes, and validates teshuva.

Viduy is the first road to repentance but there is a second road. In Hilchot Teshuva, the Rambam notes that a sinner continues to confess his previous sins every Yom Kippur even though he has not faltered since. This tells us that there is a separate mitzva of viduy, not related to the culmination of teshuva. Similarly, we encounter this idea in the viduy of the High Priest on Yom Kippur in which he confesses the sins of the Jewish people. How can the High Priest do teshuva for the Jews? Does he know if they have actually repented?

Rav Soloveitchik explains that this separate mitzva of viduy is related to the concept of atonement. Yom Kippur is a gift of atonement. While on Rosh Hashana we face strict judgment, on Yom Kippur Hashem

becomes our loving father and employs mercy to wipe our slate clean. He gives us a chance for atonement without teshuva. Therefore, a person will confess his sins again every year on Yom Kippur since he does not know how much of his sin was forgiven through the mercy of Hashem. We see this idea expressed in the korban chatat. The sinner who brings the sacrifice is commanded to confess twice: the first time as a culmination of the teshuva process when he designates the sacrifice, and a second time when he actually brings the sacrifice to the Temple. At that moment he confesses again to achieve kapara, Hashem's grace.

Rav Soloveitchik writes that when a sinner realizes what he has done a certain sense of hopelessness and intense failure engulfs him. This is one part of the teshuva process – guilt over the past. It is essential to surmount these feelings and move to the second part of teshuva – commitment to change. A person must trust his own capabilities and Hashem to help him come to complete repentance. The Creator imbued man with the ability to completely change himself. According to strict justice, man must sometimes answer with his life for the sins he's committed. However, Hashem employs his middat

harachamim and accepts a korban instead. When a person repents, he feels a great psychological sense of failure and disappointment, he sacrifices his own self worth, to come to a realization that he needs to improve. This is the korban that Hashem accepts as an atonement for sin.

The gemara writes that teshuva out of love turns sins into merits, teshuva out of fear turns willful sins into unwilling sins. The Rav explains that teshuva out of fear destroys sin. It is as if the person never did the act and is no longer responsible. However, teshuva out of love is much greater because it accomplishes tikun hara, it channels evil for good. The Rav calls this fiery teshuva. Great Tannaim such as Reish Lakish and Rabi Akiva who came to Torah later in life used their past experiences to strengthen and vitalize Torah learning. Similarly, when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur he would offer the ketoret, a mixture of eleven spices among them chelbana, a foul smelling spice. This particular spice would add a unique pungency to the sacrifice. Similarly, teshuva m'ahava redirects our sins to lead a stronger, more committed Jewish life, fired by the challenges we've faced and overcome.

## Multi-Dimensional Teshuva

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

At the close we say, "U'Teshuva, U'Tefila U'Tzedaka maavirin et roa ha-gezera — Repentance, prayer, and charity remove the harsh decree." After harboring that terrible sense of doom, this statement gives us a feeling of renewed hope that it is within our ability to annul any evil hovering above us.

We read in Pirkei Avot: "The world stands on three things: Torah, prayer, and kind deeds." These correspond to teshuva, tefila, and tzedaka. The Netivot Shalom explains that a person experiences life on three levels: Torah, which relates to his intellectual side; prayer, which corresponds to emotion; and kind acts, which parallel physical action.

The Arizal says that every soul has a certain

purpose to fulfill. Each person is a miniature world. Therefore this verse in Pirkei Avot not only applies to the outside macro world but to our own personal micro world. On Rosh Hashana we renew our intellectual, emotional, and physical commitment to Hashem.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains how teshuva and Torah are synonymous. Teshuva is not merely repentance but a return to one's natural state before sin. A Jew is inherently pure. His desires and temptations temporarily deflect him away from Hashem. While repentance involves dismissing the past and starting anew, teshuva involves returning to our root and revealing our true essence. Torah compels us to recognize that we are here for a purpose: to develop a relationship with Hashem, to bring

Him into this world, and to live by His word. Both Torah and teshuva help us recognize what our core is – to serve Hashem. Torah is the means by which we recognize this, and teshuva is the path by which we come back to this mandate. Living Torah means tapping into the spiritual spark within us. Doing teshuva is rediscovering that spiritual link with Hashem.

Tefila is not prayer or request, but attaching oneself. It comes from the root word "tafel," to connect. Tefila is about binding one's soul to Hashem. In a sense one says, "I need nothing but Your closeness." Tefila, like teshuva and Torah, involves returning to Hashem and developing a relationship with Him. Appreciation and recognition of His kindness naturally follow.

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Tzedaka is not charity but chesed. Charity implies that the recipient has no right to the gift and that the donor is under no obligation to give. On the other hand, tzedaka means righteousness or justice. The donor gives because it is his duty. Just as we ask Hashem for blessing, even though He owes us

nothing, so too should we give tzedaka. By emulating Hashem's chesed, we connect with Him.

Bringing Torah, Teshuva, Tefila, and Tzedaka into our daily lives involves commitment. Choose a sefer and learn from it daily. Do one chesed each day. Be sure to pray every day,

and select one line or tefila that you will particularly concentrate on. Teshuva, tefila, and tzedaka are about finding that spiritual linkage and uncovering who we really are in a way that reflects this reality in the purest and deepest sense.

## Opening the Gates of the Machzor: Maariv

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shoshie Nissenbaum

The Izhbitzer Rebbe notes that the prayer book of Yom Tov is called machzor as opposed to siddur. Siddur means organized, and the prayers in it are arranged in a specific way. Machzor comes from the root word l'hachzer — to return. The words of the machzor return us to Hashem.

Tefilat Zaka is the introductory prayer said before the prayers of Yom Kippur commence. The Chofetz Chaim notes that it is very important to say the end of the tefila where we declare forgiveness to everyone, except for those who owe us money which we can still retrieve. We confess to Hashem the sins we did with all the different parts of our body. Instead of using our body for good, we used it for evil. We ask Hashem to help us to use it in the future l'shem shamayim and as a me'on l'Shechina (dwelling place for the Divine Presence).

Kol Nidrei is one of the most significant prayers for which everyone should try to be present. We ask Hashem to release us of any promises that we didn't keep. There's a discussion amongst the poskim if it is a declaration from the present to the previous year or if it is a declaration for the coming year. The consensus is that it is for the coming year.

Throughout Yom Kippur we find threads of Rabbi Akiva's life woven into the tefilot. Yom Kippur is his yahrtzeit. We start the Kol Nidrei service with the verse, "Ohr zarua la'tzadik." We make a declaration to the entire congregation: "Light is sown for the righteous and for the

upright the heart gladdens." All the sifrei Torah are removed from the ark and brought around the beit hakeset. The last five words of ohr zarua spell out the name of Rabbi Akiva.

At the end of his life Rabbi Akiva said Shema Yisrael with joy at finally being given the opportunity to fulfill the words of b'chol nafshecha — to sacrifice his soul for Hashem. The verse says b'chol nafshecha and not b'chol gufo (with one's whole body), which implies a self-sacrifice of one's spirituality for Hashem. All those who cannot go to shul on Yom Kippur, such as mothers of young children and those taking care of older people, are fulfilling b'chol nafshecha. Be like Rabbi Akiva and do it with joy.

Before beginning Kol Nidrei we say, "Al daat hamakom... anu matirim." We ask permission from Hashem and the congregation that we may pray with the transgressors. On Yom Kippur there's a place for every Jew to attain purification and forgiveness. Everybody is invited and included.

The tradition among the Ashkenazim is that we begin Kol Nidrei in a low tone and it slowly gets louder. At the start we cannot even open our mouth. Then our confidence increases. We know Hashem is waiting for us and wants to hear from us. As we say Kol Nidrei for the third time, we come before Hashem like a beloved son returning to his father.

After the Vidui confession we say Selichot. Rav Munk points out that we start with the letter taf

and end with aleph. The message is that what we think we know and understand we really don't. And therefore we must go back to the beginning. We tell Hashem, "I thought I knew what it meant to have a relationship with You, what trust meant, what loyalty was about. Yaaleh tachuneinu — may my pleas rise up to You. Help me return. Teach me from aleph, just like Rabbi Akiva."

In between the piyutim we say the Yud Gimmel Middot starting with "Hashem, Hashem." "You are Hashem before the sin and after the sin. You are there to catch me and help me. Be there when I misuse my strengths and help me re-channel them in the right way."

"Kel rachum v'chanun." Hashem wants us to live. His goal is not to trick us. He does everything to help us come back to teshuva. "Rachum" — He gives us another chance. He believes we can change. He knows we can if He gives us another opportunity for life. "Chanun" — He gives even if we are undeserving. If someone finds himself overwhelmed with temptations and calls out to Hashem, He will help him. "Erech apayim" — Hashem has patience. The Chazon Ish says the root of all sin is impulsivity. When we say this, we ask Hashem to teach us to be patient with ourselves and others. "V'rav chesed" — Hashem extends His kindness to all those who lack personal merit. He rewards all our good deeds even if we sinned. "Notzer chesed l'alafim" — the benefit of one mitzvah done with love extends to thousands of future generations.