

Teshuva

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The Maharal writes that teshuva is not so much regretting one's deeds but a natural return to one's higher self. How does teshuva correct a sin and its negative impact? The Mesilat Yesharim suggests that teshuva causes your will to change, and that means you yourself have become transformed. The Maharal says that teshuva moves us beyond time. It takes us above the rules of cause and effect that define this world. On a rational level, we cannot change the past because we are locked in time. But on a supernatural level where time is irrelevant, teshuva can erase all the damages and even take a person to a higher level than he was before.

We can achieve this kind of teshuva through siyata d'shmaya—help from Hashem—and self-change. These are intertwined. How do we begin the process of self-change? The first step is doing a cheshbon hanefesh. Cheshbon hanefesh entails making an accounting of your soul through a life review. To be able to redefine who we want to be, we have to look at our past. This is because who we are today is developed from our yesterdays.

The world of intent is what defines the self. Making a life review involves dividing your life into segments—childhood, adolescence, and

adulthood. Ask yourself these questions: From where I stand today, which of the choices I made in each of these points in my life got me closer to what I want to be, and which choices distanced me? You will begin to find specific patterns and motivating factors which will point you to the source of your life mistakes. This is more important to identify than individual sins and errors.

If one does not deal with the central bad middot that drove one to sin, it is as if one is pulling out weeds but leaving the roots. A person needs to take the middot they were given and find the right address for them. This involves a combination of saying yes and no. Saying no means committing yourself to refraining from using these traits negatively. Saying yes involves acknowledging the trait and thinking of ways to feed the need it creates in a positive way.

For example, if someone continuously speaks loshon hara because of low self-esteem, he may give up loshon hara, but if he does not deal with his self-esteem issue, he may turn to other sins. Self-esteem comes from self-discipline and achievement. Involving oneself in Torah and chesed can build one's positive self-image to the point where one will

completely disassociate from disparaging others.

Another way of approaching Teshuva is looking at each sin and developing a game plan to make sure that it does not reoccur. The Maharal writes that the two basic roots of sin are ego and desire. Most of our behavior is driven by external factors. The more a person follows Hashem's ways, the more his soul controls his body, and the more his life will be determined by intrinsic factors.

Recognizing one's negative middot should not lead to depression. Instead, one should say, "I believe in myself and my abilities. I trust that Hashem wants to help me through this. Without His assistance nothing will happen. I will reject whatever holds me down."

If a person honestly faces his physical or spiritual issues with strength and bravery, Hashem will surely help him. This will take him above his limitations which were created by his past choices and intentions, to his inner core which will lead him to repentance and elevation. At this special time of year, when Hashem is most accessible to us, let us grasp the precious gift of teshuva and renew our loving bond with Hashem once again.

Returning To Our Essence

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

No day in the Jewish calendar evokes more awe, profound awakening, and inner soul-searching as Yom Kippur. If one looks at the central motifs that run through the tefilot of the day, one repeatedly finds kaparah, atonement, and taharah, purity, mentioned. Hashem says, "Ki bayom hazeh yichaper aleichem l'taher eschem. For on this day, I will atone for you and purify you." The Kohen Gadol recites this in his prayers on Yom Kippur and ends with, "Lifnei Hashem titbaru. Before Hashem shall you be purified."

We refer to these lines several times in the

Yom Kippur service. In addition, we find many references to kaparah and taharah throughout the day, such as "Kaper amcha Yisrael. Atone for the Jewish people." "Zerok aleinu mayim tehorim. Sprinkle upon us purifying waters." In essence, kaparah and taharah are the two core elements of teshuva. Kaparah is atonement, whereby one rectifies one's sins. Taharah entails purifying oneself of past evil deeds.

What does the double theme of kaparah and taharah essentially mean? Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik explains that every sin has a

two-fold impact. Firstly, each sin produces negative, damaging consequences. The sin condemns a person to an onerous, terrible punishment. Secondly, it creates a tumah, defilement, within the sinner's personality. Therefore, the teshuva process that rectifies the sin needs to accomplish two goals. The first goal, removing the sin as a source of punishment, is accomplished through kaparah. The second goal is to purify the personality of the sinner. This is achieved through taharah.



Multi-Dimensional Teshuva

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

One of the highlights of the Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur prayers is Unesane Tokef. 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 parallels 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 follows.

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.