

## 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 bring 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 harac-*

*hamim* 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.

## Yom Kippur Hardened Hearts

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

One of the first sins that we confess on Yom Kippur is the sin of *imutz halev*, hardness of the heart. We have the attitude of always being right. Such arrogance makes us stubborn, refusing to admit our shortcomings. This in turn leads to lack of compassion for the needs of the poor and infirm. Also included in this sin is refusing to listen to our rabbis and teachers who try to steer us on the straight path, and not sensing the fear and trepidation of the day of judgment.

Why are we so hardhearted? Perhaps we feel some remorse for our sins, but it doesn't drive us to improve. Rav Shwadron, quoting the Alter of Kelm, says that what we know and experience has to be on the same page. Physical pleasure blocks us from knowing what we may know in the spiritual world. The love of this world and the next is like fire and

water. When a person is able to move away a bit from the world of darkness and physicality, then there is room for spirituality to take hold in his life. We're so immersed in the material world that we cannot sense the fear of judgment. The desire to change is in the heart, but if it's closed to spirituality we cannot move forward. We cannot feel the fear of judgment when our whole mindset is bent on filling our physical desires. Aseret yemei teshuva is a time to step back and ask ourselves, "Have I gotten lost in materialism and indulged more than necessary? Let me limit my time on the computer, let me fill the vacant hours with learning Torah, doing *chesed*, and giving my spiritual needs a voice." The beginning of change is attaining the right focus in life.

How do we utilize this time of intense intimacy with Hashem? Rav Pincus gives a parable of a

farmer who has a limited measure of wheat grains. He can grind it into flour and bake a small amount of bread or he can plant the grains in the ground and hope to harvest a bumper crop. The Gemara says sowing seeds represents the idea of *emunah*. If the farmer doesn't have the faith and patience to see the planting process through, he may ruin any chance of seeing his crops grow. Likewise, anyone who wants to go through the *yomim noraim* in the proper way needs to have this model of *emunah*. So last year on Yom Kippur you felt like an angel and an hour later you yelled at your kids. If you let yourself slide into despair, you'll stay in a frozen state. We have to keep in mind that *emunah* is like planting. We don't see results right away. When we sow the seeds of prayer and repentance we must trust that with the help of Hashem it will bear fruit.

Continued on Page 2

## Yom Kippur Hardened Hearts

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

Continued from Page 1

Shlomo Hamelech says in Mishlei, "The door revolves on its hinges and the lazy one is on his bed." What stops a door from moving forward are its hinges. The hinges that holds us back is the mindset of, "Who am I? I can't change." You may open and close like a door but you'll go absolutely nowhere. Rosh Hashana is called yom harat olam, the day of the conception of the world. It's a day when Hashem recreates us and brings us back to the state of Adam before the sin. It's a day where there's nothing holding us back from starting anew. Inner change takes time but we must believe that it can happen. If we trust that the future will not be like the past, if we believe like the farmer and plant, we will see the fruits of our efforts. We'll feel the *chesed* of Hashem and be worthy of His forgiveness on Yom Kippur.

The Chovot Halevovot says a person should take stock of himself and ask himself honestly, "What are my abilities, what can I do realistically, what can I accomplish in serving

Hashem?" We can break out of our rut. We have limitless resources. But we have to take the first step. We have to want to change and grow. Then we can pray to Hashem to give us the abilities and tools to accomplish what we desire. Before blowing the shofar we say, "Ashrei h'am yodeah teruah Hashem b'or panecha yehaleichun." When a person discovers the Divine light within him, he can extricate himself from the narrowest straits. When we live in the Almighty's light, we are no longer frozen in place. We can move forward. What holds us back is our lack of belief in Hashem and in our own ability to tap into this light. If we really daven, Hashem will send us higher insight to choose the right path in life.

Rav Frand suggests taking on one *kabala* (good practice) that requires effort but not overwhelming, and telling oneself, "I will do this no matter what." *Kabalot* are like exercise. A person doesn't start off doing 100 pushups. He begins with five and works his way up. So too, when you begin to make *kabalot*, start off slowly. Rav Reisman quoting Rav Pam says a

*kabala* is like a down payment. We give Hashem something small to show him we're moving in the right direction. If we believe this small act will yield greater results, it in fact will.

Another aspect that contributes to hardheartedness is lacking faith in the idea of reward and punishment. Rav Dov Yaffe notes that we're far from fearing sin because we don't realize its severe repercussions. We have to recognize that everything we do has accountability and that sin causes spiritual defects within us and in the world around us. Rav Yitzchak Isaac Sher suggests creating a mock trial during *Aseret yemei teshuva*. You're the judge and the one standing on trial. Go through the list of al cheits and ask yourself, "Where do I stand?" The more you do this, the more it will mitigate the judgment. If we bring the judgment on ourselves and realize how wanting we are, that in itself will create fear of judgment.

May we merit to break out of our hardhearted-

## Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur Davening: Joy of Repentance #6

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Michael Taubes

In the days of the Temple, the Yom Kippur service was like no other, in terms of its majesty and the joy it engendered, for it was clear that Hashem had granted the Jewish people atonement. In the repetition of the Shemoneh Esrei of Mussaf, we recount the avoda of the Kohein Gadol in great detail. When the chazan intones how the High Priest would utter the Ineffable Name, we prostrate ourselves just as the Jews did long ago in the Beit Hamikdash.

The machzor depicts the many sacrifices that were brought on this holy day including the korbanot of the *se'er la'azazel* and the *se'er l'Hashem*. Lots would determine which of the two identical goats would be dedicated to Hashem and which would be hurled off a cliff. Rav Soloveitchik notes that this teaches significant lesson. You can choose to stay mired in your own evil, tumbling over the cliff or dedicate yourself completely to serve Hashem. As the seder *avoda* draws to a close, we recite a moving *piyut* describing the joyous, luminous

countenance of the Kohen Gadol when forgiveness was granted. We then mourn the majesty that once was. The splendor of the *avoda* is gone, all we are left with is teshuva.

During Mincha, we read the book of Yonah, which tells how the non-Jewish city of Ninveh repented for their misdeeds. This is meant to teach us that *teshuva* is open to all humanity and is a necessary means of rectification for the entire world. Rav Soloveitchik points out that a Jew's role is to interact with the world while simultaneously retaining his uniqueness. When the people of Ninveh repented, the Navi writes, "Vayar Elokim et maseihem. Hashem saw their deeds." Rav Soloveitchik writes that rituals, incantations, and fasting did not open the gates of mercy for the people of Ninveh, rather their turning away from evil and performing righteous deeds. Action speaks louder than words. Yom Kippur is like spring training before the baseball season begins. Everyone's in shul fervently praying. The real question is whose left on the team the next day. Do our actions reflect our

commitment to change?

Yom Kippur is the only day of the year that contains five *tefilot*. The stirring prayer of Neila is recited as the day wanes, and the gates of heaven close. We pray, "Ata noten yad l'poshim. You stretch out a hand to those who have sinned." During the year, one needs self motivation to return. On Yom Kippur, Hashem reaches out to accept our teshuva. We don't even need to enter the mikva. Hashem sprinkles its purifying waters upon us. We end Yom Kippur with the shofar blast. Rav Soloveitchik explains that after a full day of prayer, it as if we are telling Hashem, "I haven't begun to verbalize what I should have prayed. Please accept this cry of the shofar as my last offering." Alternatively, the shofar blast signifies a cry of delightful accomplishment. The happiness of Sukkot follows close on the heels of the *dveikut* to Hashem that we attained on Yom Kippur. May the wondrous joy achieved on this holy day permeate the entire year.