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Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future

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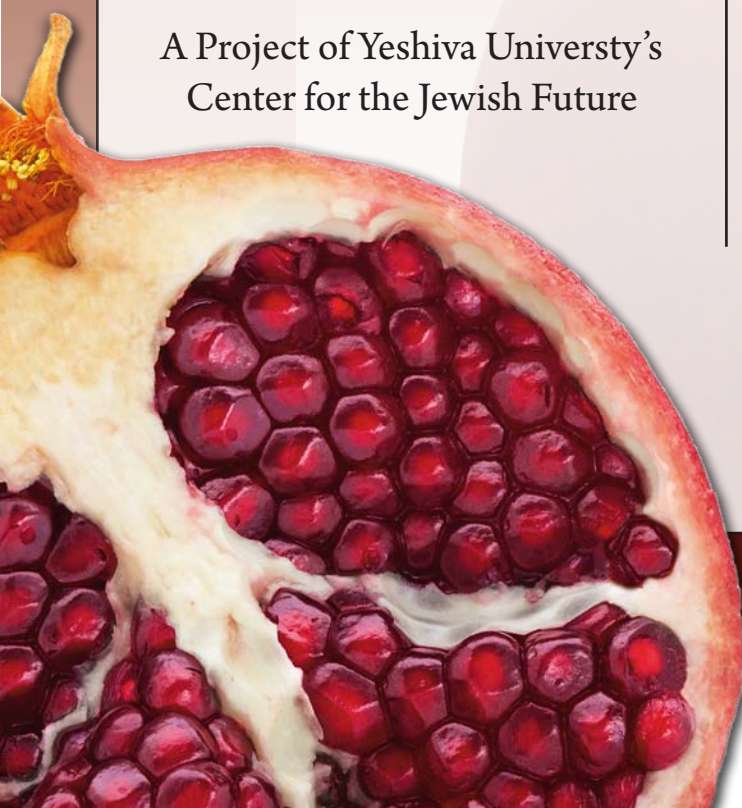


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by Carole, Gila and Avi Daman*

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# Introduction

The Gemara, in *Rosh HaShana* 16b, describes the judgement of Rosh HaShana and the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva*:

א"ר כרוספדאי א"ר יוחנן שלשה ספרים נפתחין ב"ה אחד של רשעים גמורין ואחד של צדיקים גמורין ואחד של בינוניים צדיקים גמורין נכתבין ונחתמין לאלתר לחיים רשעים גמורין נכתבין ונחתמין לאלתר למיתה בינוניים תלויין ועומדין מ"ה ועד יו"כ זכו נכתבין לחיים לא זכו נכתבין למיתה.

*R. Kruspedai said in the name of R. Yochanan: Three books are opened on Rosh HaShana: one for the completely wicked, one for the completely righteous and one for those in the middle. The completely righteous are written and sealed immediately for life. The completely wicked are written and sealed immediately for death. The middle hang in abeyance from Rosh HaShana to Yom Kippur. If they merit, they are written for life. If they do not merit, they are written for death.*

The Rambam quotes this passage in his *Mishneh Torah*, with one small, yet significant, change:

בכל שנה ושנה שוקלין עונות כל אחד ואחד מבאי העולם עם זכיותיו ביום טוב של ראש השנה, מי שנמצא צדיק נחתם לחיים, ומי שנמצא רשע נחתם למיתה והבינוני תולין אותו עד יום הכפורים אם עשה תשובה נחתם לחיים ואם לאו נחתם למיתה.

*Each year on Rosh HaShana, each and every person in the world has his or her transgressions weighed against his or her merits. Anyone who is found to be righteous will continue living, whereas anyone found to be wicked will be assigned a death sentence. The middle person is held in suspense until the Day*



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*of Atonement — if he or she repents, the decree will be for life, but if not, the decree will be for death.*

### Rambam, *Hilchos Teshuva* 3:3

In the Gemara's version, the "*beinoni*," the individual who expresses neither the righteousness of the *tzadik* or the wickedness of the *rasha*, is suspended in judgement pending the ultimate outcome on Yom Kippur. Yet when the Rambam records this statement of the Gemara, he posits that the determining factor for the *beinoni* is *teshuva*. Rav Yitzchak Hutner, in his work *Pachad Yitzchak* (*Rosh HaShana* 18), asks: If indeed the *beinoni* is a person who teeters between virtue and evil, why not simply demand that the *beinoni* exert a greater effort in tipping that scale through the fulfillment of mitzvot? Why does the Rambam introduce the complex and overwhelming institution of *teshuva*, when clearly, all that is needed is a greater commitment to the observance of mitzvot?

Rav Hutner explains that the categories of *tzadik*, *rasha*, *beinoni* do not refer to quantitative evaluations of an individual's Torah observance. It is nearly impossible to capture a status evaluation of religious commitment. We are constantly engaged in either fulfilling or ignoring the expectations of the Torah. Therefore, these

categories are what Rav Hutner describes as "*middos binefesh*," attributes of the soul. They represent an overall disposition of commitment and passion toward religious life. The *tzadik* strives to constantly embrace Torah and mitzvot as the foundation of life. The *rasha* may occasionally observe something proper, but has an overall disposition toward antagonism and dismissiveness of religious growth.

The *beinoni* is the one in the middle. The *beinoni* represents complacency, satisfied with living a life that is not too invested in religious growth, yet conforming enough to meet the threshold of basic Torah expectations. The *beinoni* leads a life of religious mediocrity, content to remain entrenched in his or her current state of observance and faith. The Rambam is instructing us that the path out of the *beinoni* identity is not simply found in doing another mitzvah. Rather, it requires a total reorientation of focus on religious growth that is framed by a passion and commitment to grow.

*Teshuva*, as explained by Rav Kook, *Oros HaTeshuva* (ch. 7 and 8) is an opportunity to discover the light within ourselves. A chance to reignite, not just our commitment to the expectations of Torah, but



to a religious personality that seeks meaning and purpose in everything that we do. This rejection of complacency and mediocrity is fundamental to shaping and nurturing a committed Jewish community that can inspire and educate the next generation.

The *tzadik* and *rasha* are judged immediately. The *beinoni* must look toward the future. The *beinoni's* judgment is based on how he or she confronts the challenges of tomorrow, which will ultimately shape his or her future. As Yeshiva University celebrates the investiture of our fifth president, Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, this

is an opportunity for us to look toward the world of tomorrow — to find the passion and purpose that comes from engaging new frontiers and new challenges in all dimensions of our lives.



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# Selichos Chizuk - The “Process”

**T**he desperate, holy blasts of our shofar on Rosh Hashanah reflect the cries of the mother of one of the most barbaric Cananite generals in history, when she realized that he was killed in battle.

The prevalent custom is to blow one hundred blasts of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. Tosafos (*Rosh Hashanah* 33b) quotes the *Aruch*, who bases this custom on a Midrash that draws a parallel between our one hundred blasts and the one hundred cries of the mother of Sisra, the Cananite general killed by Yael after he fled from the battle waged against him by Barak and Devorah (Shoftim chapter 5).

Rav Soloveitchik explained that her cries are the model for our teshuva. At first, she was nervous when Sisra did not return in a timely manner, and she groaned, fearing the worst. Despite the attempts of her family and friends to reassure her — “To the contrary, his delayed arrival is a sign that the spoils of war are so numerous,” they said — as time dragged on, she began to sob. Finally, word came back that he would not be coming home ever again. Upon hearing that news, she completely broke down in tears. Our shofar blasts are an external expression of our internal breakdown. At first, we groan (*tekiah*), but the yeitzer hara tries to convince us that there is really nothing wrong. If we are successful, we will begin to sob (*shevarim*), as we begin to internalize that there is work to be done. Finally, we break down (*teruah*), in a realization that we are so far from our potential connection to Hashem.

Not only does true change require a sincere process, the lowering of our



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defense mechanisms does as well.

In a completely different area of Torah, Hakadosh Baruch Hu expresses how critical this process is to Him:

הַשֹּׁמֵר בְּנִגְעַת הַצֶּרַעַת לִשְׁמֹר מֵאֵד וְלַעֲשׂוֹת כָּל אֲשֶׁר יֹרֶוּ אֶתְכֶם הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִים בְּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִם תִּשְׁמְרוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת. וְזָכֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' אֱלֹהֵיךָ לְמִרְיָם בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם.

*In cases of a skin affliction be most careful to do exactly as the Levitical priests instruct you. Take care to do as I have commanded them. Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam on the journey after you left Egypt.*

### Devarim 24:8-9

In unusual fashion, the Torah warns us to be very careful to follow the rules of a *tzaraas* affliction. Apparently, there is a concern that the laws of *tzaraas* will not be properly observed.

The very next statement of the Torah (these two verses are a section in and of themselves as demonstrated by the *stumos* bookending them) is an instruction to remember what Hashem did to Miriam on the way, when Bnei Yisroel left Mitzrayim. How is that instruction related to the prior warning? Does remembering Miriam encourage the observance of the *tzaraas* laws, or is it a distinct idea?

Rashi explains (based on the Gemara, *Shabbos* 94b) that the first verse is a prohibition to remove any element of the *tzaraas* that would purify it.

In order to be problematic, a *tzaraas* affliction must possess two white hairs. If one were to remove a white hair (with tweezers, for example), the affliction would no longer be impure. Despite the fact that it would work to remove the *tzaraas* — or perhaps *because* it would work — its removal is prohibited. Rashi then quotes the *Sifrei* that the next verse adds that if one wants to avoid having *tzaraas* altogether, he should remember what Hashem did to Miriam — He gave her *tzaraas* for speaking lashon hara. If one wants to avoid *tzaraas*, rather than plucking out white hairs after he already has it, he should avoid speaking lashon hara in the first place.

The Netziv however, in *Haamek Davar* Devarim 24:9, sees another message here. It is not clear that Miriam had the status of a *metzora* at all. When Moshe discovered that Miriam had a *tzaraas* affliction, he davened to Hashem to heal her, which was an unusual response to *tzaraas*. Did her *tzaraas* go away as soon as Moshe davened? Why did Aharon not examine her affliction and deal with her as a *metzora*? Hashem told Moshe that because of her actions she should spend seven days outside of the camp. If she was being sent out of the camp for seven days as a technical “*hesger*,” (required isolation), why did Hashem make a specific instruction both to send her out and to bring her back in

after seven days? It seems that she was merely exiled from the camp for seven days and then brought back, without going through the remainder of the *metzora* process. How do we explain this? (See Bamidbar chapter 12)

The Talmud (*Zevachim* 102a) seems to be bothered by this when it asks who dealt with the *tzaraas* of Miriam (who sent her out)? A Kohen has to pronounce a *tzaraas* affliction impure, but all of the Kohanim were Miriam's relatives, and a relative cannot rule on a relative's *tzaraas* affliction. So who, in fact, dealt with her *tzaraas*? The Talmud answers that Hashem did it Himself. Tosafos asks: if no one can rule on her affliction, then it remains pure and she is not a *metzora*. If so, what is the point of the Gemara and what is Aharon so upset and nervous about (see Bamidbar 12:11-12)? Tosafos have no answer.

The Netziv answers the question. While it is true that sometimes the pain of a *tzaraas* affliction is sufficient to atone for the *metzora*, when *motzi shem ra* (lashon hara that is not true) is involved, the sin is worse, and requires one to go through the entire *metzora* process in order for the individual to atone (being exiled from the camp, having to shave all of his hair, bringing a sacrifice etc.). The fact that no one could deal with her *tzaraas* technically meant that she would never be able to go through the purification process and that she would not be able to achieve the necessary atonement! That would be a disaster.

What did Hashem do for Miriam? He created a unique purification process that normally did not exist, in order to allow her to atone for her sin.

“Remember what Hashem did to Miriam” — Hashem did two things to

Miriam. He gave her *tzaraas*, but He also gave her a way to rectify the sin that caused it.

When a person finds himself in a situation in which he has more than just the pain of a *tzaraas* affliction, he is told by the Kohen that his *tzaraas* is impure and he must go through the entire process. While the easy way out would be to pluck out a hair, to remove the affliction, that is prohibited, because the Torah wants him to go through a process of change. If he has difficulty inspiring himself to go through the process, he should remind himself what Hashem did to Miriam. Remember how critical the process is!

Growth or change, in any respect, physical or spiritual, takes place in steps and stages. Skipping a step developmentally results in failure at best and regression or degeneration at worst.

This time of year, it is important to remember what Hashem did to Miriam. He performed a miracle, so that she could have a pathway to atone for her wrongdoing. He created a process for her.

Selichos is a similar process. In the same manner that Sisra's mother cried, we need to peel away layers of defense mechanisms to expose our feeling heart. Unfortunately, if we are not careful, we may feel their power the first night of Selichos and after that, we might read through them without feeling. In reality, the Selichos should be more and more meaningful and urgent as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur approach. We cannot simply make our blemishes disappear — remember what Hashem did to Miriam.

## Tzara'at Imagery in the Admission of Guilt

The *tzara'at* imagery is used in Tehillim to symbolize sin. Tehillim chapter 51 is the prayer that King David offered after he was confronted by Natan the prophet regarding the incident with Batsheva. The verse (Tehillim 51:9) states:

תְּחַטְּאֵנִי בְּאִזְבִּיחַ וְאַטְהֶר תְּכַבְּסֵנִי וּמִשְׁלֵךְ אֲלֵבַי.

*Purge me with hyssop till I am pure; wash me till I am whiter than snow.*

Radak explains why the hyssop is mentioned:

כי העון בנפש כמו הכתם בבגד או נגע צרעת בגוף. ואמר תחטאני, כמו שמוחטאים באזוב שהוא סוף הטהרה שמזין עליו באזוב, כן תחטאני מעוני. והחיסוי הוא הסרת החטא.

*The sin is to the soul like the stain is to a garment or tzara'at is to the body. It states "purge me" just as purging is done with the hyssop, which is the end of the purification [of the metzora], when the waters are sprinkled with the hyssop. Similarly, purge me of my sins. The purging is the removal of the sin.*

Malbim adds that the hyssop specifically represents humility. This imagery fits nicely with the comment of R. Azariah Figo, *Binah L'Ittim* derush no. 40, who contrasts King David's admission of guilt with King Shaul's. When King Shaul is confronted by Shmuel, he admits he is wrong, but makes an excuse (Shmuel I 15:32). When King David is confronted by Natan, he states, "I have sinned to HaShem" (Shmuel II 12:13), without making any excuses. King Shaul's sin and his lack of proper admission led to the end of his reign, whereas King David's humility in admitting wrongdoing became a hallmark trait of his leadership of the Jewish people.

**Torah To Go Editors**



# Staying Engaged

One of the most prestigious, albeit relatively unknown, talmidim of the Alter from Slobodka was Rav Avraham Elya Kaplan, who would go on to become the head of the Hildesheimer Rabbinic Seminary until his death at the young age of 37. Rav Avraham Elya notes in his spiritual autobiography, *B'ikvos Ha'yirah*, what it was like to come back to Slobodka Yeshiva, in the presence of the Alter, for an Elul zman. To spend even a single day in the rarified air of Slobodka in Elul was a transformative experience that continued to resonate with Rav Avraham Elya decades later.

Whenever I would see those words quoted from *B'ikvos Ha'yirah*, or when I would read other similar recollections about the environment of awe that permeated the halls of *batei medrashos* (study halls) of days gone by, I always wondered why the name Elul, and the portent behind it, didn't have the same effect on my own religious conscience. Why would I, and perhaps many others reading this article, not have the reaction of a trembling anticipation knowing that the Yom HaDin is fast approaching? And, more important, why didn't we understand the opportunities for growth and personal transformation that Elul and Tishrei bring?

While explanations abound for this lack of enthusiasm for teshuva, perhaps one can argue that our apathy is a reflection of past disappointments. Perhaps many have felt, at different points in their lives, a sense of optimism that they are capable of real change, only to see just days and weeks later that true change is elusive.



## Rabbi Josh Blass

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It is indeed difficult to muster an awakened passion for teshuva when a person consciously or subconsciously feels that “This is who I am and this is who I will forever be.”

If the attitude that I am describing is accurate, how then does one counteract this sense of *yei'ush*, hopelessness? One possibility is to genuinely recognize that teshuva is a long process and that the goal is to be able to change over the course of a lifetime. To some degree comments from Chazal and the Rambam seem to imply that teshuva needs to be total and immediate. Throughout Rambam's *Hilchos Teshuva* (see 2:2, 2:4 and 7:7), the implication is that teshuva needs to be absolute and that at the end of this process even Hakadosh Baruch Hu can testify that this repentant will never return to his old ways.

With that said, many meforshim take a far more moderate stance about the issue of “half a teshuva.” For instance, the Mabit in his *Beis Elokim* (*Sha'ar Hateshuva*, beginning of ch. 12,) held that if a person has genuine remorse, even though he has not committed to changing his future actions, his repentance is efficacious, albeit on a more limited scale. This position seems to run counter to the Rambam, *Hilchos Teshuva* 2:3, who says that such a teshuva is completely worthless.

I have found that adopting the position of the Mabit, which recognizes that we are on a life journey of change and transformation, allows us to have a somewhat healthier attitude about teshuva. This attitude also helps us to avoid the destructive pitfall of self-castigation if and when we fail to completely turn our lives around.

There might also be another attitude that helps one to become engaged in the teshuva process, even if he or she is somewhat skeptical as to how permanent their return might be.

There is a well-known debate in the rishonim about whether or not teshuva, is in fact, a mitzva. The Ramban, Devarim 30:11, and others believe that it is a mitzvah, while the Rambam's position is not clear. In a well-known comment, the Rambam, *Hilchos Teshuva* 1:1, states:

כל מצות שבתורה, בין עשה בין לא תעשה,  
אם עבר אדם על אחת מהן, בין בזדון בין  
בשגגה, כשיעשה תשובה וישוב מחטאו חייב  
להתודות לפני האל-ל ברוך הוא.

*If one transgressed any commandment of the Torah, whether a positive or a negative one, whether deliberately or accidentally, then when one repents, one has to confess verbally to G-d.*

This ambiguous language of “when one repents,” has led some to believe (*Minchas Chinuch* 364:2) that there is no formal obligation to do teshuva



and that repentance is fundamentally a *mitzvah kiyumis*, an optional mitzvah with a significant fulfillment if performed. This understanding of the Rambam has led to much speculation among the achronim as to why teshuva is not a mitzvah. Between all of the pesukim in Sefer Devarim and all of the statements of Chazal that speak about teshuva in the most elegiac of fashions, wouldn't one think that it's an obligation to repent?

While many answers have been provided to this question (see *Meshech Chachma*, Devarim 30:11, *Ha'emek Davar*, Devarim 30:11, *Mishnas Yaavetz*, *Orach Chaim* no. 54), one can suggest that repentance is not a formal mitzvah because it reflects man's natural return to himself. The *Ba'al Hatanya* and others speak about man's natural state of G-d consciousness and the pain that we feel when we move away from that state. Teshuva is not an external mitzvah that needs to be mandated, but is an outgrowth of man's natural desire to seek spiritual meaning and wholeness. Man doesn't need the mandate to be *chozer*

*b'teshuva*, and doing so might cheapen the beauty of our natural tendencies.

This concept is reflected in the writings of the Maharal (*Nesiv Hateshuva* ch. 2), in which he says that teshuva is a process of being *chozer el haschalaso* — returning back to the beginning, returning back to one's initial and natural state. All of the comments of Chazal — teshuva brings healing to the world, teshuva reaches the *Kisei Hakavod* (Celestial Throne) etc., reflect this notion of a natural return to self. Perhaps that is what the Rambam intended to say: that this process doesn't need to be mandated.

If in fact teshuva is construed as a moment of a return back to the beginning, back to a truer version of oneself, then perhaps more important than teshuva reflecting sustained change, as important as that might be, teshuva is a chance — perhaps for just a few moments perhaps for longer — to reconnect with our own pristine essence. That singular moment of return seems to be reflected in the Gemara in *Rosh Hashana* 16b, that

records the following statement in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak:

אין דנין את האדם אלא לפי מעשיו של אותה שעה.

*Man is only judged based on his status at that particular moment.*

This idea is developed in greater detail in R. Shlomo Wolbe's *Alei Shur* (Vol. I), in his writings about the Yamim Noraim.

If the goal of teshuva is to have a moment in which we deeply feel that we are approaching the Celestial Throne, then what comes down the road is less significant than having a moment of genuine reconnection. It is those moments that fuel our sense of self and motivate genuine spiritual ambition. It is those moments that we can generate internally even without the sublime environment of Slobodka. As emotionally, physically, psychologically and spiritually draining as this month-and-a-half-long process of repentance can often feel, let us collectively fully engage in that process knowing the incalculable benefits of that *sha'ah achas*, the single moment of returning to oneself.



### **Rabbi Soloveitchik on Applying the Principles of Teshuva to Modern Times**

... Interestingly, this very idea constitutes the basis of all modern psychotherapy, i.e., a person's actions do not necessarily reflect or emanate from his real self, but from a pseudo-self. Thus it is that a person can change behavior, and experience positive change and personal growth. This is not simply a philosophical principle, but something that has practical consequences for every rabbi, teacher, and parent. Especially in our time, we should each strive always to appeal to people's better, deeper, and more authentic selves, that are not always apparent to others. I have often said that there are two kinds of *mussar*, rebuke. The first tells the sinner that he has done bad things and must renounce his erroneous ways. The problem with this approach is that it does not always work — and can even be counterproductive. ... Today we must favor the second approach. ... We should speak to them with words that convey that they are not as bad as they think, that their errant actions are not consistent with their core selves, which remain unsullied and pure at all times.

*Adapted by Rabbi Dr. Basil Herring from a lecture given by Rabbi Soloveitchik in 1956.*

*The full summary is available at [www.torahmusings.com/2014/09/regret-annulment-essence-teshuva](http://www.torahmusings.com/2014/09/regret-annulment-essence-teshuva).*

**Torah To Go Editors**

# Teshuva and the Question of Change

Throughout the Yamim Noraim we do teshuva, the heart of which is a commitment to change for the better. This idea of change is complicated, as we know that in our Torah lives sometimes change is necessary and sometimes it is frowned upon. True introspection — a prerequisite to teshuva — requires that we explore how to maintain our commitment to personal and communal traditions while still developing in a positive religious direction, growing closer to Hashem.

Change is difficult. Regarding a change of character traits, it is reported that Rabbi Yisrael Salanter considered it more difficult to change one deficient trait than to master all of Talmudic literature. Behavioral change is also a monumental task. The strenuous nature of this kind of change is attested to in the written works of many prominent researchers and clinicians, including Dr. James Prochaska and Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski.

One of the most complex issues we face in the world of change in our religious lives is whether we should change in the first place. Often, we deliberately maintain a particular practice since this is how we've acted throughout our lives, perhaps in



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continuation of our parents' behavior. Sometimes these practices exist across an entire community and may be a notable hallmark of a specific group. Change in our religious lives can be controversial and filled with tension. We find an example among students who study in Israel for a year after high school and often change their religious behavior, bringing home new customs, a stronger commitment to Torah study, as well as what some would call a stricter level of observance. In a study of this phenomenon, begun in May 2007, the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration<sup>1</sup> found that while most parents supported their children's changes in religious behavior, some parents reacted negatively. This study highlights a question that we each face individually, and our community faces collectively: when should religious change be encouraged and when should it not? Which practices should we maintain and strengthen and which should we leave behind as we go through life? Does it matter

if these changes are focused on spiritual accomplishments or social conventions? What about changes between varying Torah communities and traditions?

## A Need For Change

It can be universally agreed upon that in certain areas of Jewish life, personal change is necessary. In the world of Torah study, for example, we must change over time. There would be an obvious deficiency if one's understanding of a verse in Chumash as a grown adult were at the same level of sophistication and shared the same perspective as that of an elementary school child. Similarly, a basic goal of maturation in life is to change our behavior over time to reflect a more refined character. The verse in Mishlei states:

הִחֲזֵק בְּמוֹסָר אֶל תִּרְץ נִצְרָה כִּי הִיא חַיִּיד  
*Hold fast to discipline; do not let go; keep it; it is your life.*

**Mishlei 4:13**

The Vilna Gaon, in his *Commentary to*

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Mishlei explains:

כי היא חייר: כי מה שהאדם חי הוא כדי לשבור מה שלא שבר עד הנה אותו המדה לכן צריך תמיד להתחזק ואם לא יתחזק למה לו חיים.

*It is your life: Because the reason why a person lives is to break the [negative] character traits that one has not broken until now. For this reason, one must constantly inspire oneself, and if one doesn't want to inspire oneself, why live?* We all expect our children to grow out of the self-centered behaviors of youth and build emotionally intelligent lives that include new levels of empathy and concern for others. This constant change — seeking new ways to improve our character — is the essence of our lives, according to the Vilna Gaon.

## Staying the Same

However, there are other aspects of our lives in which we do not encourage change as we age. In his magisterial eulogy for the late Rabbi Chaim Heller zt”l, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik described the aspiration of maintaining childlike faith in one’s religious life and one’s *emunah* in Hashem. Unlike the intellectual realm of Torah in which one morphs and grows over time, the experiential feeling of G-d’s presence requires a youthful perspective, which he ascribes to his own grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik zt”l:

מה היה הסבא שלי, ר’ חיים, איש בריסק? מחד גיסא - גדול המחשבה המופשטת, שהכניס שינויי יסוד במתודולוגיה ההלכתית, ר’ חיים הגדול. ומאידך גיסא - ילד קטן ורך, שלא יכול לכבול את רגשותיו הרוותחים, געגועיו למשהו יפה ונעלה, חלומותיו ותקוותיו. הוא, איש המשמעת הקפדנית בתחום השכל, שכבש וריסן בדפוסי היגיון חד ודייקני את כל העושר ההלכי, נישא ללא כל הסתייגות בזרם

עוז של פשטות, תמימות, רגישות, מבוכה, בהלה ילדותית וגם ביטחון שלא ישוער, אל מרחבים אשר לא שזפתם עין. דברי הגות והערכה עמ’ 159

*Where you find their maturity you find their childlike quality. What was my grandfather, R. Hayyim of Brisk? On the one hand, he was a great abstract thinker, who introduced basic conceptual transformations in the field of halakhic methodology. On the other hand, he was a child, unable to restrain his warm emotions, his yearning for something beautiful and elevated, his dreams and hopes. He, the man of iron discipline in the intellectual sphere, who captured the richness of halakha in acute, exact, logical molds, was swept without reservation in a bold stream of simplicity, innocence, sensitivity, perplexity, childish confusion, but also immeasurable confidence.*

**Shiurei HaRav (ed. Joseph Epstein) pg. 63**

This fealty to a religious experience of youth may be found expressed in a beautiful image — the shawl of Shmuel Hanavi. When faced with his final crisis, King Shaul seeks a sorceress to conjure up the soul of Shmuel for guidance. When she does, she describes his appearance:

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַה תֵּאָדָר וַתֹּאמֶר אִישׁ זָקֵן עָלָה וְהָיָה עֹטָה כְּמַעִיל וַיֵּדַע שָׁאוּל כִּי שְׂמוּאֵל הוּא וַיִּקַּד אַפָּיִם אֶרְצָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה.

*“What does he look like?” he asked her. “It is an old man coming up,” she said, “and he is wrapped in a robe.” Then Saul knew that it was Samuel; and he bowed low in homage with his face to the ground.*

**Shmuel I 28:14**

The immediate question is, how did Shaul know from this simple, nondescript portrait that this was, in fact, Shmuel? Rashi cites a verse earlier in the book of Shmuel:

וּמַעִיל קֹטָן תַּעֲשֶׂה לּוֹ אִמּוֹ וְהַעֲלֵתָהּ לּוֹ מִיָּמִים יְמִימָה בַּעֲלוּתָהּ אֶת אִישָׁהּ לְזִבְחָ אֶת זֶבַח הַיָּמִים.

*His mother would also make a little robe for him and bring it up to him every year, when she made the pilgrimage with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice.*

**Shmuel I 2:19**

Rashi explains:

והוא עוטה מעיל. שהיה רגיל ללבוש מעיל, שנאמר ומעיל קטן תעשה לו אמו, ובמעילו נקב.

*He is wrapped in a robe; he was accustomed to wearing a robe as it states, “His mother would also make a little robe for him,” and he was buried in his robe.*

It is incredible that one of the greatest prophets of Jewish history, in his old age and into the afterlife, was still wearing the same shawl that his mother, Chana, knitted for him when he was a child. The shawl not only symbolizes the youthfulness described by Rabbi Soloveitchik, but also symbolizes how Shmuel Hanavi identified with his parents. It is a symbol of his identification with his upbringing and the family within which he was raised.

Each of us has a shawl given to us by our parents that we must keep with us, no matter what age or stature we attain. This concept of familial loyalty and its accompanying resistance to change is a strict halachic principle based on a Talmudic story:

בני ביישן נהוג דלא הוו אולין מצור לצידון במעלי שבתא אתו בנייהו קמיה דר’ יוחנן אמרו לו אבהתין אפשר להו אנן לא אפשר לן אמר להו כבר קיבלו אבותיכם עליהם שנאמר שמע בני מוסר אביך ואל תטוש תורת אמן.

*The residents of Beit She’an were accustomed not to travel from Tyre to market day in Sidon on Shabbat eve. In deference to Shabbat, they*



*adopted a stringency and would not interrupt their Shabbat preparations even for a short sea voyage. Their children came before Rabbi Yohanan to request that he repeal this custom. They said to him: Due to their wealth, it was possible for our fathers to earn a living without traveling to the market on Friday; however, it is not possible for us to do so. He said to them: Your fathers already accepted this virtuous custom upon themselves, and it remains in effect for you, as it is stated: "My son, hear your father's rebuke and do not abandon your mother's teaching." In addition to adhering to one's father's rebuke, i.e., halacha, one is also required to preserve his mother's teaching, i.e., ancestral customs.*

**Pesachim 50b (Translation from The William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noé Talmud)**

This Gemara is the basis of the concept of minhag and the binding nature of personal, familial and communal precedent. Halacha grants significant weight to authentic minhagim in almost all cases.<sup>2</sup> Oftentimes, prior practice helps establish halachic standards, and changes to prior practice can also raise concerns of disrespecting previous generations. Just one example of this is found in the halachic discussion in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe regarding the kosher status of turkey. The *Darkei Teshuva*, in his commentary to *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 82*, cites these arguments in the name of the Netziv: since people have been consuming turkey with the presumption that it is kosher, we cannot overturn that presumption without a bona fide proof that it is not kosher because doing so will cast aspersions on previous generations that they ate non-kosher.

This is true not only of personal and familial customs; it is equally true of communal character as well. Each community within the overall spectrum of Judaism must maintain its unique traditions in Jewish outlook and practice. Moreover, it is noteworthy that a diversity of minhagim and practices between Jewish communities and families is not just an accident of history. It is an intentional, original design of the Jewish people. The creation of twelve distinct tribes reflects the need for differentiated modes of avodat Hashem. The classic introduction to the Chabad Siddur, *Sha'ar HaKollel*, makes this point in stating that there are going to be thirteen gates of entry to the Third Beit HaMikdash, one for each tribe, and a thirteenth that is all-encompassing. This is to reflect the many gateways and traditions to serving Hashem.

We learn that it is important to maintain the character of our specific community within the masorah of Torah communities.

## **A Challenge**

The challenge, then, is how to balance this commitment to the unique character of our family and community with a quest to come ever closer to Hashem, which is our ultimate calling as avdei Hashem. Does fealty to tradition mean that we should never adapt or change in new circumstances? Should it be enough to say that we should never deviate from the practice of our parents and grandparents? What if this practice is inconsistent with accepted halacha? Does any shift in more scrupulous observance mean we are moving, as is often described, "to the right"? This question could be answered with a

rhetorical question. Would a business executive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century decline use of a website for ordering today because his firm didn't do business that way in the 1950s? Certainly not.

Imagine a couple celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary. Would anyone expect the manner in which they speak to and treat each other to change in the years that they've known each other? Certainly not. As both the book of Shir Hashirim and the book of Eicha describe, we have a relationship with Hashem, our beloved. This relationship is deepened over time, and things that would have been acceptable during the initial stages of our relationship may no longer be appropriate. Times change and circumstances change. While certain practices may be appropriate in a given time and place, they may no longer be appropriate at a later time. This need for revision throughout life is conveyed in a fascinating parable of a map maker:

*But the biggest problem of map-making is not that we have to start from scratch, but that if our maps are to be accurate we have to continually revise them. The world itself is constantly changing. Glaciers come, glaciers go. Cultures come, cultures go. There is too little technology, there is too much technology. Even more dramatically the vantage point from which we view the world is constantly and quite rapidly changing ... If we are to incorporate this information, we must continually revise our maps, and sometimes when enough new information has accumulated, we must make very major revisions. The process of making revisions, particularly major revisions, is painful, sometimes excruciatingly painful. And herein lies the major source of many of the ills of mankind.<sup>3</sup>*

Once we understand that within a commitment to one's personal and communal past there is still room, and sometimes a necessity, for new ideas and practices, we still face the challenge of navigating change. How do we know when change is appropriate and when it is not?

Perhaps a first consideration is motivation. Is the change to a new practice motivated simply by a lack of confidence and desire to imitate another person or community? If so, then it is just shallow mimicry. If, however, it is a truly profound affinity for a specific religious community or overall desire to grow closer to Hashem that motivates change, then it is worthy of consideration. Additionally, a second, more complex issue is assessing the merit of the both the current and proposed practice.

## Merit

Before abandoning a current practice, one must research and understand its values and merits. Occasionally, current practices may seem questionable on the surface but upon further inquiry have a sound halachic basis.<sup>4</sup> On some occasions, however, we encounter a practice that is deemed a *minhag ta'ut*— an errant practice, which lacks halachic merit entirely. For example, no one could claim that they have a family or community minhag to eat non-kosher food just because members of a previous generation, who were not observant, did so.

A similar inquiry should be done regarding the acceptance of a proposed practice. Does this new practice fulfill a Biblical or Rabbinic mitzvah or is it a stringency? Stringencies, known as *chumrot*,

are a meaningful and time-honored expression of piety. However, our rabbis have always stressed caution and balance when introducing them, as they may violate the Torah's restriction against arrogance and sanctimony. The Gemara states:

אליעזר זעירא הוה סיים מסאני אוכמי וקאי בשוקא דנהרדעא אשכחוהו דבי ריש גלותא וא"ל מאי שנא הני מסאני אמר להו דקא מאבילנא אירושלים אמרו ליה את חשיבת לאיתאבולי אירושלים סבור יוהרא הוה אתיוה וחבשוה

*Eliezer Ze'eira was wearing black shoes, unlike the Jewish custom of that time, and standing in the market of Neharde'a. Officials of the house of the Exilarch found him and said to him: What is different about you that causes you to wear these shoes? He said to them: I am wearing them because I am in mourning over the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem, and so I wear black shoes, as is the custom of mourners. They said to him: Are you a man of such importance to publicly mourn over Jerusalem? They thought that it was simply presumptuousness on his part. Since he was acting against the prevalent Jewish custom, they brought him to the prison and incarcerated him.*

**Baba Kama 59b (Translation from The William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noé Talmud)**

Chazal are teaching us that only certain individuals are entitled or permitted to observe certain *chumrot*— for others they are off limits, as they are beyond the person's current spiritual rank. In addition, the value of a stricture must be weighed against other halachic and meta-halachic considerations that may counterbalance it. As the Talmud notes, a stricture in one area of halacha and life may actually be a leniency and infringement upon another area.<sup>5</sup>

## Hesitation

Even when all of these conditions are fulfilled satisfactorily, we often still feel uncomfortable around others who have made positive religious changes, as described in the Azrieli study above. We also often hesitate

## R. Moshe Chaim Luzzatto on Taking on Additional Stringencies

והנה מה שצריך להבין הוא כי אין לדון דברי החסידות על מראהיה הראשון, אלא צריך לעיין ולהתבונן עד היכן תולדות המעשה מגיעות, כי לפעמים המעשה בעצמו יראה טוב, ולפי שהתולדות רעות יתחייב להניח, ולו יעשה אותו יהיה חוטא ולא חסיד... יש איזה תוספות חסידות שאם יעשה אותם האדם לפני המון העם ישחקו עליו ויתלוצצו, ונמצאו חוטאים ונענשים על ידו, והוא היה יכול להניח מלעשות הדברים ההם, כי אינם חובה מוחלטת.

*What a person needs to understand is that one should not judge the matters of chasidut according to their superficial appearance. Rather, one must examine and contemplate the full extent of where the future consequences of the deed leads. For sometimes, the deed itself may appear to be good but since the consequences are evil one must abstain from it. For doing it would not have made him a chasid but rather a sinner ... there are some additional matters of piety, which if a person were to do before the common people, they will laugh at him and ridicule him, thereby sinning and incurring punishment through him, and this is something he could have abstained from doing since these things are not complete obligations.*

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to make these changes for ourselves even when we know they are advisable and even necessary. Why are we so reticent? This is something with which I personally struggle, like many others, as Eric Hoffer notes in his book, *The Ordeal of Change*. There are many factors that impede and hinder change. In the context of teshuva, we can point to one emotional and psychological core issue that nags at our subconscious. It is highlighted by the words of the Rambam, who describes the transformation of teshuva in chapter 7 of *Hilchot Teshuva*:

גדולה תשובה שמקרבת את האדם לשכינה שנאמר שובה ישראל עד ה' אלהיך ונאמר ולא שבתם עדי נאם ה' ונאמר אם תשוב ישראל נאם ה' אלי תשוב כלומר אם תחזור בתשובה בי תדבק התשובה מקרבת את הרחוקים אמש היה זה שנאי לפני המקום משוקץ ומרוחק ותועבה והיום הוא אהוב ונחמד קרוב וידיד.

*Repentance is of the greatest importance, inasmuch as it brings a man nearer to the Shechinah; for it is said: O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God (Hos. 14. 1); again it is said: Yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord (Amos 4. 6.); and it is also said: If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return unto Me (Jer. 4. 1); meaning, if thou wilt but turn with repentance, thou wilt cleave unto Me. Repentance brings near to God those that were remote from Him. The same man who, but the day before, was despised, condemned, and rejected by God, is now beloved, accepted, a kin and a favorite.*

#### **Hilchot Teshuva 7:6**

On one level, these comments of the Rambam are incredibly empowering and invigorating. Each of us has at hand the opportunity to completely transform ourselves and our relationship with Hashem through teshuva. It is dramatic. It can be summarized in a quote from the Alter

of Slabodka, “Teshuva is not becoming better: it is becoming different.”<sup>6</sup>

However, there is a clear implication here regarding the status of a person before teshuva, and perhaps this impedes teshuva. When I see someone else who has made changes in their lives, perhaps some part of me feels (and perhaps on some level we ought to feel) “despised, condemned and rejected by G-d.” Perhaps the reflection makes us feel inadequate. The thought of making changes and moving forward may make us uncomfortable because it challenges our past identity. It labels us in a way we don’t like. Hence, we avoid change. We aren’t prepared to condemn our past selves and completely change our identity — to literally change our name as the Rambam also encourages (*Hilchot Teshuva* 2:4).

#### **Development, Not Change**

Perhaps the answer to this concern and hesitation is an approach to teshuva suggesting that G-d and the halacha do not actually require us to shed our prior identity, even if it were sinful, in favor of a new one. Teshuva is about continuous development rather than a wholesale change of identity.

This idea is demonstrated in a remarkable story in the Gemara, *Menachot* 44a, describing the religious journey of a prostitute. The Gemara records that a certain individual was about to commit an illicit act with this prostitute, when his tzitzit hit him on the face. This inspired him to cancel his appointment. The woman was so moved by this, she asked the individual to write his name on a piece of paper, and she began a journey toward conversion to Judaism. The Gemara continues:

עמדה וחילקה כל נכסיה שליש למלכות ושלש לעניים ושלש נטלה בידה חוץ מאותן מצעות ובאת לבית מדרשו של ר' חייא אמרה לו רבי צוה עלי ויעשוני גיורת אמר לה בתי שמא עיניך נתת באחד מן התלמידים הוציאה כתב מידה ונתנה לו אמר לה לכי זכי במקחך אותן מצעות שהציעה לו באיסור הציעה לו בהיתר זה.

*Thereupon she arose and divided her estate into three parts; one third for the government, one third to be distributed among the poor, and one third she took with her in her hand; the bed clothes, however, she retained. She then came to the Beth Hamidrash of R. Hiyya, and said to him, ... “Master, give instructions about me that they make me a proselyte.” He replied: “My daughter, perhaps you have set your eyes on one of the disciples?” She thereupon took out the script and handed it to him. He said: “Go, and enjoy your acquisition.” Those very bed-clothes which she had spread for him for an illicit purpose she now spread out for him lawfully.*

**Menachot 44a (Translation from The William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noé Talmud)**

There are many incredible aspects and lessons of this story. One of the most striking is the fact that she does not discard the old bed clothes of her prior life when she arrives at the doorstep of Rabbi Hiyya’s yeshiva, nor does Rabbi Hiyya instruct her to do so. On the contrary, he encourages her to keep what might seem to be an obvious reminder of a not-so-honorable past. This Talmudic passage teaches that when we make changes in our lives, even drastic ones, we do not need to disown or rewrite our pasts. Maharal (*Chiddushei Aggadot* there) notes the woman sold two-thirds of her property, yet she kept one-third. He suggests that the allocation of the funds symbolizes that although most of her life was being transformed, she



maintained a piece of her prior self. We learn that even a convert, whose transformation is compared by Chazal to being “born like a child,” is not completely reborn. Part of their prior identity remains with them as a badge of honor, not a mark of Cain.

This notion, that as we do teshuva we do not reject our past, demonstrates that we seek to develop more than we seek to change. Change, or “flipping out,” means becoming something or someone else. Development means taking myself to another level, closer to Hashem and closer to my potential. This is why Judaism’s term for repentance is teshuva, which literally means a return. Teshuva is about returning to our true selves, not becoming something or someone else. This may be why when we do teshuva, we do not erase our past misdeeds. When we embrace spiritual development with love, our past errors become merits as Reish Lakish teaches:

אמר ריש לקיש גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו כשגגות שנאמר שובה ישראל עד ה' אלקיך כי כשלת בעונך הא עון מזיד הוא וקא קרי ליה מכשול איני והאמר ריש לקיש גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו כזכויות שנאמר ובשוב רשע מרשעתו ועשה משפט וצדקה עליהם (חיה)

יחיה לא קשיא כאן מאהבה כאן מיראה. Reish Lakish said: Great is repentance, as the penitent’s intentional sins are counted for him as unwitting transgressions, as it is stated: “Return, Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled in your iniquity” (Hosea 14:2). The Gemara analyzes this: Doesn’t “iniquity” mean an intentional sin? Yet the prophet calls it stumbling, implying that one who repents is considered as though he only stumbled accidentally in his transgression. The Gemara asks: Is that so? Didn’t Reish Lakish himself say: Great is repentance, as one’s intentional sins are counted for him as merits, as it is stated: “And when

the wicked turns from his wickedness, and does that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby” (Ezekiel 33:19), and all his deeds, even his transgressions, will become praiseworthy? The Gemara reconciles: This is not difficult: Here, when one repents out of love, his sins become like merits; there, when one repents out of fear, his sins are counted as unwitting transgressions.

**Yoma 86b (Translation from The William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noé Talmud)**

Reish Lakish, one of the Talmud’s most renowned baalei teshuva, ultimately concludes that past actions remain a proud, meritorious part of our identity. This perspective on teshuva as not wholly rejecting our prior, unredeemed identity is advanced clearly by Rav Kook in his writings.<sup>7</sup> Here is one example:

כשעוסקים בתשובה ... צריך לברר את הטוב הנמצא בעומק הרע ולחזק אותו - באותו הכח עצמו שבורחים מן הרע, כדי שתהיה התשובה כח פועל לטובה, המהפכת ממש את כל הזדונות לזכויות.

*When we engage in repentance ... we need to filter out the good that is found in the depths of the bad and strengthen it — with the same energy that we have when we run away from the bad — in order that the repentance has a positive energy that can actually transform our wanton deeds into merits.*

**Shemonah Kevatzim 1:240**

We learn that we can find positive qualities even in flawed behavior. We do not need to hide or be ashamed of our past or of our parents. We do not need to judge previous generations. Rather we can look to their good qualities with pride and learn from them even if our practice diverges as we develop.

The need to develop a fealty to our past is a delicate balance. We must maintain

the unique traditions of our families and our *baalei masorah*. We do not need to mimic others or convert to any of the other tribes of Israel. However, as part of our teshuva process, we must engage in what Rav Aharon Lichtenstein zt”l, termed “introspective commitment and committed introspection.” In “The Future of Centrist Orthodoxy,” an essay whose relevance has not diminished over the passage of time, he teaches us that:

Above all, what is needed is a *heshbon ha-nefesh*: a process of self-examination that should recognize, and hence develop, strengths, but that should also acknowledge, and hence issue an initiative to surmount weakness. As we approach the mitzvah of teshuva during the days of awe, we should consider how our commitment to change this coming year will be both a continuation of our personal and communal traditions and a new stage in developing our relationship with our Creator.

## Endnotes

1 David Pelcovitz and Steven Eisenberg, “The Year In Israel Experience” (2010).

2 In cases where a minhag conflicts with established halacha, see Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim 690, Chasam Sofer there and Shu”t Aseh Lecha Rav vol. 3 page 84.

3 M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*, pg. 25.

4 An example of this could be the practice found among Tunisian and other Jews to throw the pieces of challah to those seated at the Shabbat table. While halacha generally prohibits throwing bread, this practice is based on the tradition that our table is like the mizbeach and the offerings on the mizbeach must be thrown.

5 See, for example, *Pesachim* 48b.

6 *Great Jewish Wisdom*, p. 113.

7 For a further discussion, see *Yesh Lech Kanfei Ruach*.

# Of Apples, Honey, and Black-eyed Peas

## The How, Why, and Why-not of Simanei Rosh ha-Shana

Some of the great joys of learning and studying halacha and minhag are the grand vistas and big ideas that we often discover in the exploration of problematic details. As part of our Rosh ha-Shana preparation, an examination of one such detail of practice — the colorful array of foods that annually adorn our Rosh ha-Shana tables — can also inspire and equip us for a more profound yom tov experience. Moreover, this intellectual journey can provide us with globally important skills and insights particularly relevant for 21<sup>st</sup>-century Jews, enabling us to appreciate and discern authentic, sophisticated religious experience throughout the year.

While it is somewhat curious that eating honeyed apples on Rosh ha-Shana night — a minhag mentioned some seven centuries ago by the *Tur*<sup>1</sup> — is far more prominent among Ashkenazim than consuming leek, black-eyed peas, and the other items cited more than 1½ millennia ago by the Gemara in *Massechtos Horayos* 12a and *Kereisos* 5b,<sup>2</sup> the most surprising and most troubling aspect — as we are about to discover — is that we allow *any* of these foods at our yom tov tables.



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#### I. Superstitious Se'uda?

In *Parashas Shofetim*, the Torah forbids many occult practices, particularly *nichush*:

לֹא יִמָּצֵא בְּךָ מַעֲבִיר בְּנוּ וּבָתוּ בָּאֵשׁ קֶסֶם  
קְסָמִים מְעוֹנֵן וּמְנַחֵשׁ וּמַכְשֵׁף.

*Let no one be found among you who ...  
practices nichush ...*

**Devarim 18:10**

In the *Sifrei* (the *midrash halacha* on Bamidbar and Devarim), the tannaim defined “*nichush*” as engaging in superstitious behavior:

ומנחש – איזהו מנחש? כגון האומר נפלה  
פתי מפי, נפלה מקלי מידי, עבר נחש מימיני  
ושועל משמאלי ופסק צבי את הדרך לפני; אל  
תחיל בי – שחרית הוא, ראש חודש הוא,  
מוצאי שבת הוא.

*Who qualifies as a “menachesh”? [One who interprets natural happenings as signs or portents] e.g., “His bread fell from his mouth; therefore ...,” “his stick fell from his hand; therefore ...,” “a snake on his right, a fox on his left, a deer crossed his path; therefore ...,” and one who says “Do not begin” (a new enterprise) — it is morning; it is the New Moon; it is the end of Shabbath.”*

**Sifrei 171 trans. adapted from Sefaria**

This *Sifrei* is quoted in *Masseches Sanhedrin* 65b, and it is codified as a matter of halacha by Rambam (*Avoda Zara* 11:4) and *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yore De'ah* 179:3). Yet this seems to stand in direct contradiction to the Gemara mentioned above, which appears to recommend consuming particular foods as a way to magically ensure a year of beracha!

Both Meiri and Rav Yaacov of Lisa address this quandary, and both of their answers actually flow from a third, striking Gemara.

#### II. Superstitious or Simply Super?

In discussing the bounds of forbidden *nichush*, we learn in *Masseches Chullin* 95b, that:

אמר רב כל נחש שאינו כאליעזר עבד אברהם  
וכיונתן בן שאול אינו נחש.

*Rav said: Any nichush unlike that of Eliezer (Avraham's servant) and of Yonasan (son of Shaul) does not qualify as nichush.*

Rav points to two episodes in Tanach that serve as paradigms of *nichush*: Eliezer selecting a wife for Yitzchak by waiting to hear the significant phrase, “I’ll water your camels as well” (Bereishis 24), and Yonasan deciding whether or not to charge up the hill at the enemy Pelishtim camp by testing whether the Pelishtim stream down the hill at Yonasan or invite him uphill (Shemuel I 14). Acting based on a sign — as did Yonasan and Eliezer — is the paradigm for forbidden *nichush* according to Rav.

*Ba’alei ha-Tosefos* are shocked: are these tzaddikim, Yonasan and Eliezer, actually models of sin? *Ri ba’al ha-Tosefos*<sup>3</sup> answers that Yonasan and Eliezer planned to act regardless, Yonasan relying on his judgment and Eliezer upon *zechuso shel Avraham*, the merit of Avraham; the signs were merely an additional *siman* but were not dispositive whatsoever. Truly acting based upon signs, though, would indeed violate the prohibition against *nichush*.

In his *chiddushim*, Rabbeinu Nissim<sup>4</sup> offers an alternative *teirutz*:

וכך נראה לי בתירוץ של דברים, שהנחש שאסרה תורה הוא התולה את מעשיו בסימן שאין הסברא נותנת שיהא גורם תועלת לדבר או נזק, כגון פתו נפלה לו מידו או צבי הפסיק לו בדרך שאלו וכיוצא בהן הם מדרכי האמורי. אבל הלוקח סימנים בדבר שהסברא מכרעת שהם מורים תועלת הדבר או נזקו אין זה נחש, שכל עסקי העולם כך הם, שהרי האומר אם ירדו גשמים לא אצא לדרך ואם לאו אצא אין זה נחש אלא מנהגו של עולם. ואליעזר ויהונתן – בכיוצא בזה תלו מעשיהם, שאליעזר יודע היה שלא היו מזוגין אשה ליצחק אלא הוגנת לו לפיכך לקח סימן לעצמו שאם תהא כל כך נאה במעשיה ושלימה במדותיה עד שכשיאמר לה הגמלאיני נא מעט מים תשיבהו ברוח נדיבה גם גמליך אשקה אותה היא שהזמינו מן השמים ליצחק. וכן יהונתן שבקש להכות במחנה פלשתים הוא ונושא כליו בלבד לקח סימן זה: שאם

יאמרו אליו עלו אלינו יהא נראה שהם יראים ממארב, ובכיוצא בו בטח יונתן בגבורתו שהוא ונושא כליו יפגעו בהם, שכן מנהגו של עולם ששנים או שלשה אבירי לב יניסו הרבה מן המופחדים. ואם יאמרו דומו עד הגיעו אליכם יראה מדבריהם שאינם מתפחדים, ובכיוצא בזה לא היה ראוי ליהונתן שימסור עצמו לסכנה וכל כיוצא בזה מנהגו של עולם הוא. וכי מייתי לה בגמרא לענין איסור ה”ק, שכל נחש שהוא מהדברים שאסרה תורה שאין הסברא מכרעת בהן כל שאינו סומך על מעשיו ממש כמו שעשו אלו השנים בדבר מותר אינו נחש ואינו אסור אע”פ שהוא מדרכי הנחשים האסורים.

*I believe the solution is as follows: The Torah forbade nichush when one relies upon a siman for which there is no logical basis to presume it causes benefit nor harm, such as divining based upon bread falling from one’s hand or a deer crossing one’s path. These examples are indeed superstitious. If, however, one employs simanim with a logical basis — why, that is typical everyday living! For instance, “I shall not travel if it will rain, but I shall travel if it won’t rain” is typical practice, not nichush.*

*Eliezer and Yonasan employed the second [and permissible] type of siman. Eliezer sought a woman who would be appropriate for [the great tzaddik] Yitzchak, and so he took the following as his siman: if she is so refined and of developed character as to generously respond to my request for water with an offer to water my camels as well, she is a good fit for Yitzchak. Similarly, Yonasan — who sought to attack an entire Pelishti camp with only one companion — took the following as his siman: if they say to us, “Come up the mountain [to fight us],” they must be frightened of ambush, and then we can reasonably rely on our capabilities, as a couple of courageous soldiers can effectively disperse a large group of frightened ones. However, if they say to us, “Wait and stand your ground, we are headed*

*towards you [to fight],” then they seem unafraid, and logically we ought to flee rather than fight.*

*The Gemara referenced these episodes in order to teach us even if a siman is illogical, it is only forbidden if one acts upon it as did these two [Eliezer and Yonasan].*

Acting based upon signs is prohibited provided that the signs are nonsensical, as are the examples mentioned by the *Sifrei* above. There is no rational reason to avoid business subsequent to bread dropping from one’s mouth or a deer (or black cat) crossing one’s path, so such avoidance violates the biblical prohibition against *nichush*, superstition. By contrast, choosing to take an umbrella based upon sky color (grey rather than blue) is a sensible, scientifically-based heuristic and is therefore permitted. Similarly, volunteering unasked to provide several hundred gallons of water<sup>5</sup> certainly indicates exceptionally proactive and insightful *chesed*, and a mountaintop garrison’s surprising hesitancy to charge down at a pair of enemy soldiers reveals the garrison’s remarkable weakness or low morale, so Eliezer and Yonasan violated no prohibition. Combining his explanation with that of *Tosefos*, Ran writes there are two criteria that must be met for violation of *nichush*: **truly acting upon a meaningless sign.**

This pair of concepts is quoted by rishonim in discussing an adjacent Gemara as well. As the sugya progresses, a *baraisa*<sup>6</sup> teaches us that sometimes what seems like prohibited *nichush* is in fact permitted, a mere *siman*:

תניא רבי שמעון בן אלעזר אומר בית תינוק ואשה אף על פי שאין נחש יש סימן  
Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says: “home,” “wife” and “child” are not *nichush*, but rather a *siman*.



What distinguishes a permitted *siman* from forbidden *nichush*? Rambam writes:

[ד] אין מנחשין כעכו"ם שנאמר לא תנחשו ... וכל העושה מעשה מפני דבר מדברים אלו לוקה. [ה] מי שאמר דירה זו שבנתי סימן טוב היתה עלי, אשה זו שנשאתי ובהמה זו שקניתי מבורכת היתה מעת שקניתי עשרתי; וכן השואל לחינוק אי זה פסוק אתה לומד אם אמר לו פסוק מן הברכות ישמח ויאמר זה סימן טוב כל אלו וכיוצא בהן מותר הואיל ולא כיון מעשיו ולא נמנע מלעשות אלא עשה זה סימן לעצמו לדבר שכבר היה הרי זה מותר.

*It is forbidden to practice nichush*

... And **whosoever commits an act as a result of any one of such divinations, is lashed.**

*One who said: "This dwelling which I built was of good prefigurement," "this wife whom I married has brought a blessing to me" ... Likewise, one who asks a child, "What verse are you studying?" if he mentioned to him a verse of the blessings, he may rejoice and say: "This is of good omen." All such and the like is permitted;<sup>7</sup> seeing that he neither regulated his actions nor withheld himself from performing them by these signs, save that he made for himself a mark of a thing which already had come to pass, this is permitted.*

**Rambam (Avoda Zara 11:4-5); trans. adapted from Sefaria**

In other words, "a mere *siman*" means that one does not actually decide and act based upon this sign. It is esthetic, not heuristic. *Hagahos Maimoniyos*<sup>8</sup> notes that this understanding of *siman* aligns with the *Ri ba'al ha-Tosefos* and the first criterion above. He goes on to cite Rabbeinu Eliezer of Metz who developed the second criterion above, that of *davar be-lo ta'am* versus *ta'am ba-davar*.

### III. Take One: Meiri

Returning to *simanei Rosh ha-Shana* and the question of *nichush* raised above, one solution is offered by Meiri:

הרבה דברים הותרו לפעמים שהם דומים לנחש, ולא מדרך נחש חלילה אלא דרך סימן לעורר בו לבבו להנהיגה טובה. והוא שאמרו ליתן על שלחנו בליל ראש השנה קרחס"ת קרא רוביא כרתי סלקא תמרי שהם ענינם מהם שגדלים מהר ומהם שגדלתם עולה הרבה. וכדי שלא ליכשל בהם לעשות דרך נחש, תקנו לומר עליהם דברים המעוררים לתשובה – והוא שאומרים בקרא "קראו זכיותינו" ... ובכרתי "יכרתו שונאינו" ר"ל שונאי הנפש והם העונות ... וידוע שכל זה אינו אלא הערה, שאין הדבר תלוי באמירה לבד רק בתשובה ומעשים טובים ...

*Many behaviors are permitted despite seeming to be nichush, for these are not surely not actual nichush but are instead a siman to inspire an individual to proper conduct. This explains why the Gemara instructed that one serve various plant foods at his table on the eve of Rosh ha-Shana, as some of these plants grow rapidly and some grow to significant height. And, in order to avoid this being done in a superstitious fashion, the rabbis instituted that we recite repentance-oriented formulae in conjunction with these foods ... It is well-known that these are but inspiration, as the real crux is not these formulae, but rather repentance and good works.*

#### Meiri Horayos 12a

According to Meiri, *simanei Rosh ha-Shana* are not meant to directly, intrinsically determine our *gezar din* (verdict) for the coming year, but are instead a tool, an instrument for inspiring us to do teshuva. It is teshuva that does impact our *gezar din*, and the brief tefillos that accompany the foods serve to ensure that we do not mistake the foods for anything but teshuva-catalysts. (Note as well

that Meiri interprets the language of each of those tefillos as references to teshuva.) This explanation is cognate to the first criterion above, *siman be-alma*; according to Meiri, *simanei Rosh ha-Shana* are meant to be psychologically inspirational, not materially influential.

### IV. Take Two: Rav Yaacov of Lisa

Rav Yaacov of Lisa<sup>9</sup> suggests in his *Emes le-Ya'acov* that the basis for *simanei Rosh ha-Shana* lies in the Tanach-wide concept of *po'al dimyon* developed by Ramban in his *Peirush al ha-Torah* (Bereishis 12:6).<sup>10</sup> Ramban writes that a *nevua* (prophecy) that is both spoken and acted out by the *navi* (prophet) is more potent than one that is only delivered verbally. It is for this reason that throughout Tanach, a *navi* may be instructed to both pronounce a given *nevua* and concomitantly perform a *po'al dimyon*, an action that portrays and mimes the content of that particular *nevua*.

By analogy, a tefilla that is both spoken and mimed is even more powerful than one that is only spoken. The objective of *simanei Rosh ha-Shana* is to serve as *po'alei dimyon*, enhancing and multiplying the power of the tefillos "Yehi ratzon ..." which they accompany. Instead of a solely verbal request for a *shana tova u-mesuka* (a good and sweet year), for *ribbui zechuyos* (increase in merits), and for *kerisas sone'einu* (destruction of our enemies), we both say those tefillos and mime them by eating corresponding foods, thus equipping our Rosh ha-Shana with enhanced tefillos.

This second explanation is cognate with the second criterion above in the definition of *nichush*, namely *ta'am ba-davar*. According to Rav

Yaacov of Lisa, *simanei Rosh ha-Shana* are permissible because while they are meant to effectively impact our year, they do so in an explainable, rational fashion — by leveraging and multiplying our verbal tefillos.

## V. Reflections

Two reflections flow from this approach of Rav Yaacov of Lisa. First, it highlights the critical importance of uttering the tefillos “*Yehi ratzon ...*” (To instead focus solely on consuming the array of *siman* foods while neglecting the tefillos is to embrace the *tafel*, secondary, while ignoring the *ikkar*, primary.)

Moreover, the Rav<sup>11</sup> famously developed the notion of *teki’as shofar* as a primal, wordless form of tefilla. Taken together with Rav Yaacov of Lisa’s insight, Rosh ha-Shana emerges as the tremendously consequential yom ha-din (day of judgment), which understandably requires us to employ not only routine methods of tefilla, but rather the full suite of tools in our tefilla arsenal, including both wordless and mimed forms of expression. Certainly, its more standard tefillos similarly demand singular effort and unique focus.

As we prepare to organize and energize our toolkit of tefillos — our Rosh ha-Shana panoply — to the best of our ability, may we merit *kabbalas ha-tefillos*.

אֲחוֹת קִטְנָה תְּפִלוֹתֶיהָ  
עוֹרְכָה וְעוֹנָה תְּהִלּוֹתֶיהָ  
בְּנֵעָם מְלִים לָךְ תִּקְרָאָה  
וְשִׁיר וְהַלּוּלִים כִּי לָךְ נִאָּה  
לְצוּר הוֹחִילוּ בְּרִיתוֹ שְׁמֵר  
תַּחַל שָׁנָה וּבִרְכוּתֶיהָ

## Endnotes

1 Tur (Orach Chayim 583). Interestingly, the Gra (*loc. cit.*) suggests that the apple recreates the episode of *birkas Yitzchak*, and that it occurred on Rosh ha-Shana.

2 According to Tosfos (Avoda Zara 5b), it is already indicated in a *mishna* (Chullin 83a).

3 Quoted by Tosfos and Ritva *ad loc.*

4 *Ad loc.* See also the commentaries on the above-referenced Rambam, particularly *Kesef Mishne* who expands upon this thesis of *Rabbeinu Nissim*, as well as *Hagahos Maimoniyos* who references an earlier partial source for this position in *Sefer Yere'im*.

5 [nationalgeographic.com/weepingcamel/thecamels.html](http://nationalgeographic.com/weepingcamel/thecamels.html).

6 This *baraisa* appears as well in *Bereishis Rabba* 85:5 in the context of Yehuda’s refusal to marry his third son Sheilah to Tamar (*Bereishis* 38:11).

7 In his comments, Ra’avad (*ad loc.*) disagrees with this reading of the passage in *Masseches Chullin*. He believes that the Gemara is concerned with the efficacy of the *siman*, not with its halachic permissibility. Ran explores Rashi’s position on this question. *Hagahos Maimoniyos* supports the position of Rambam and Tosfos; see especially the strong language in his closing sentence: “כל זה הארכתי נגד המשחיתים המלעיגים על פסקים – I have written on this at greater length in order to counter those who destructively belittle these halachic rulings [namely, the halachic distinctions accepted by Rambam and Tosfos].”

8 *Ad loc.* 11:5:4\*.

9 He is better-known for his *Nesivos (ha-Mishpat)* and *Chavvos Da’as*. *Emes le-Ya’acov* is a 94-page sefer on *aggados ha-Shas*.

10 Ramban sees this notion of *po’al dimyon* as lying at the core of *ma’ase avos siman la-banim* — the episodes of the forefathers are a *siman* for the history of the Jewish people to come — a concept that he takes as fundamental in globally understanding sefer Bereishis.

11 See *Mi-Peninei Ha-Rav* (Shofar 8, p. 126), *et al.* For the Rav, this perspective on shofar also explains why mitzvas shofar is fulfilled during tefilla — unlike other mitzvos such as lulav, hallel and *keri’as ha-Torah* which are fulfilled in the synagogue but not during Shemone Esrei.

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# Shabbos Yom Kippur:

## Discovering the *Oneg* in the *Inuy* of Life

**Y**om Kippur is a day entirely devoted to the spiritual experience of being *lifnei Hashem*, before G-d. The Torah tells us:

כִּי בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכַּפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטָהָר אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל חַטֹּאתֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי ה' תִּטְהָר.  
For on this day atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins; you shall be clean before the Lord.

**Vayikra 16:30**

We reach the climax of connection with the Divine through a variety of ways: the context created within the solemnity of the day; our complete immersion in the world of prayer; and the abdication of our basic physical pleasures and needs in order to accentuate the vibrancy of our soul. Interestingly, the dominant halachic character of Yom Kippur is in the observance of its restrictions: the prohibitions against eating, drinking, bathing, anointing, wearing leather footwear, and marital intimacy.

Indeed, the poskim are clear that if illness compromises one's capacity to fully observe the fast, it is more important to remain home and spend the day resting in bed, than to attend shul and risk having to expend enough energy that would require eating or drinking (*Shemiras Shabbos KeHilchasa* 39:28). The obligation to fast on Yom Kippur is one of the Torah's most stringent expectations. Violating this prohibition is subject to the punishment of *kareis* (Vayikra 23:29). Yet the Gemara in Yoma



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85a, states unequivocally that any Torah prohibition, aside from the three cardinal sins, whose observance would risk a person's life, is suspended indefinitely in deference to the health and wellbeing of the individual. There are occasional situations, therefore, in which eating and drinking on Yom Kippur becomes necessary, and as such, a requirement. It is beyond the scope of this article to address the parameters of health conditions and their relevant halachic requirements with respect to Yom Kippur. Some situations permit an individual to attempt to fast, some permit the eating and drinking of *shiurim*, which would entail a lower form of prohibition, and some situations demand a total capitulation to satiating the body with food.

The question we are going to explore, from both a halachic and a hashkafic perspective, is: how does an individual who is required to eat on Yom Kippur relate to the halachic character of the day? How does this individual observe and relate to Yom Kippur?

### Birkas HaMazon

The *Tur*, *Orach Chaim* no. 618, writes in the name of his father, the Rosh:

חולה שאכל ב"ה ונתיישב דעתו בענין שיכול לברך היה אומר אדוני אבי הרא"ש ז"ל שצריך להזכיר של י"ה בברכת המזון שאומר יעלה ויבא בבונה ירושלים.

*If an individual ate on Yom Kippur (for health reasons) and is of a mindset that would allow him to recite a blessing, my father, Rabbeinu Asher, has said that he should mention Yom Kippur in Grace After Meals by reciting Ya'aleh V'Yavo in the blessing about building Jerusalem.*

An individual who eats on Yom Kippur is required to recite Birkas HaMazon and include *Yaaleh VeYavo* with the individualized insertion of "*Yom HaKippurim hazeh*." The *Beis Yosef* quotes the Maharam MiRutenburg who presents the following formulation:

ודבר פשוט הוא דבהיתר אכיל ואדרבה מצוה קא עביד הוי לדידיה יום הכפורים כמו לדידן שאר ימים טובים.

*This is an obvious point because the individual was permitted to eat the food. In fact it was a mitzvah, and for this individual, Yom Kippur is like our other festivals.*

### Beis Yosef, Orach Chaim no. 618

Yom Kippur is comprised of many dimensions of sanctity. It has the underlying *kedusha* of a standard yom tov, which is suppressed



and overshadowed by the unique requirements of *inuy* (affliction). Therefore, the festive aspect of Yom Kippur's identity usually remains dormant. However, if a person must break his or her fast, this dimension emerges and presents the identical manifesting elements of a yom tov, like any other chag, namely, the inclusion of *Yaaleh VeYavo*.

The *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 618:10, rules that one who eats on Yom Kippur recites *Yaaleh VeYavo*. The *Knesses HaGedolah, Orach Chaim* 618, goes so far as to require *lechem mishneh* (two loaves of bread), however the *Magen Avraham* states that this is not the accepted practice. In fact, the *Magen Avraham* quotes the *Shibolei HaLeket*, who presents an entirely different perspective. The *Shibolei HaLeket* quotes Rav Avigdor Katz that the permissibility to eat on Yom Kippur essentially unravels the entire character of Yom Kippur altogether. He describes the day for this individual as “*hava ledidei kechol*” — for this individual, the day is like an ordinary weekday — and therefore one does not make Kiddush or mention Yom Kippur in Birkas HaMazon. The *Magen Avraham* himself seems to agree fundamentally with this opinion, but in deference to the *Tur*, he suggests reciting *Yaaleh VeYavo*, while exempting one from making Kiddush because of a concern of *beracha levatalah* (blessing in vain). The *Taz, Orach Chaim* 618:10, seems to agree with the *Magen Avraham* in principle, but goes further and exempts one from including *Yaaleh VeYavo* in Birkas HaMazon without any concern for the opinion of the *Tur*. The *Mishna Berurah* 618:29 follows the ruling of the *Magen Avraham* that one recites *Yaaleh VeYavo* but not Kiddush and adds that if one forgot the insertion, one would not repeat Birkas HaMazon.

This dispute is explained by R. Mayer Rooz, *Minchas Mayer* no. 15, as being rooted in the nature of the underlying sanctity of Yom Kippur. According to one approach, there are two conflicting identities to Yom Kippur. On the one hand, it has the status of yom tov. On the other hand, it is a day of *inuy*. The Torah is clear that the requirements of *inuy* dominate the elements of yom tov. However, when those requirements are lifted, then perhaps the generic *kedushas yom tov* would reemerge, requiring one to at least recite *Yaaleh VeYavo*, and possibly engage in other elements of the yom tov experience.

The other approach views the *inuy* on Yom Kippur as definitional to the entire nature of the day. It is not a yom tov that is overshadowed by *inuy*, but rather it is fundamentally a day of *inuy*. It is a *mikra kodesh* — a festival, but its nature is a *mikra kodesh* of *inuy*. As a result, if one becomes exempt from the *inuyim*, the entire nature of the day has been compromised and we would not encounter any of the generic yom tov qualities in the resulting reality. The *mikra kodesh* is no longer applicable. An *issur melacha* (prohibition against creative labor) remains, but the underlying character of the yom tov is gone.

### When Yom Kippur Occurs on Shabbos

Rav Akiva Eiger, in his glosses to the aforementioned *Magen Avraham*, makes a fascinating distinction between a calendar year in which Yom Kippur occurs on a weekday, and one in which it occurs on Shabbos. If Yom Kippur occurs on Shabbos, there is another layer of *kedusha* that has been added to this reality. Even if the *Magen Avraham* and the *Taz* are

correct that there is no *mikra kodesh* independent of *inuy* that would require reciting Kiddush on Yom Kippur, this is only because Kiddush on yom tov is a rabbinic enactment and the rabbis never instituted Kiddush on Yom Kippur. However, on Shabbos, when there is a biblical obligation to recite Kiddush, one would imagine that there is a requirement to recite Kiddush. Furthermore, Shabbos exists as an entity independent from Yom Kippur, and therefore, when the obligations of Yom Kippur do not prevent one from fulfilling the obligations of Shabbos, one should fulfill those obligations.

Yet we find a different approach to the convergence of Shabbos and Yom Kippur in a comment of R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk. The Rambam writes:

עבודת כל חמש עשרה בהמות אלו הקריבין  
ביום זה אינה אלא בכהן גדול בלבד ... ואם  
היתה שבת אף מוסף שבת אין מקריב אותו  
אלא כהן גדול.

*The offering of these fifteen animals on [Yom Kippur] must be performed by the Kohen Gadol ... If [Yom Kippur] occurs on Shabbos, the mussaf offering of Shabbos must be performed by the Kohen Gadol.*

### Rambam, Hilchos Avodas Yom HaKippurim 1:2

Why does the offering for Shabbos have to be brought specifically by the Kohen Gadol? On an ordinary Shabbos, any Kohen can bring the Shabbos offering. R. Meir Simcha, *Ohr Sameiach, Hilchos Avodas Yom HaKippurim* 4:1, explains that the Rambam is of the opinion that when Yom Kippur occurs on Shabbos, the entire nature of *kedushas Shabbos* becomes redefined by the experience of Yom Kippur. For this reason, the offerings that are exclusive and unique to Shabbos also become part

of the service of the Kohen Gadol. The *Minchas Mayer* argues that the comments of the *Ohr Sameiach* present a challenge to R Akiva Eiger. One sees from the Rambam that the *kedusha* of Shabbos does not exist as an independent entity when Yom Kippur occurs on Shabbos.

The convergence of Shabbos and Yom Kippur can be understood in two ways. One is to view the experience of *inuy* as entirely independent of Shabbos, while the other recognizes the capacity of *inuy* to redefine the nature of the Shabbos experience entirely.

In life, we strive mightily to discover meaning and resonance in the world of *mikra kodesh*. There are many aspects of our religious experience that present moments of sanctity, and our challenge is to connect to their purpose and to their transformative impact upon our lives. Indeed, there is a hovering angelic dimension to Yom Kippur that is palpable in an experiential and very tangible way. Part of our mandate on Yom Kippur, through the requirements of *inuy*, is to strip away our indulgence and temptation, and focus ourselves entirely on the purest form of sanctified existence. In a world where the notion of spirituality and transcendence is entirely counter cultural, this is becoming increasingly challenging. We ourselves, and certainly our children, are finding the synagogue experience more and more distant from our modern lives and contemporary experiences. Shuls throughout the world recognize the difficulty of connecting to the world of Yom Kippur and are introducing

programs and opportunities for people to address those concerns. Yet this is one of the dimensions of Yom Kippur that is so crucial, and expressed so poignantly by the position that we continue to recite *Yaaleh VeYavo*, make Kiddush, and perhaps even include *lechem mishneh* in a compromised Yom Kippur experience. The *inuyim* of Yom Kippur are not an obstacle to *avodas Hashem*. On Yom Kippur, they act as a vehicle to create the context for *avodas Hashem* without any distractions.

However, viewing the experience from the perspective of the *Ohr Sameiach*, perhaps there is an additional message as well. We so often bifurcate our lives between the religious ideals we seek to observe and to embrace, and the extraordinary challenges that we face in moving forward in our own personal development and *avodas Hashem*. We view the *inuyim* of life as a barrier to religious growth — one that stands in opposition to the momentum that we seek to create with our commitment, Torah learning, and religious observance. Yom Kippur is perhaps projecting a different message. Those challenges are not independent of our religious experience, but are, rather, part of it. As the Ramban explains regarding the *nisayon* (test) of Avraham:

ענין הנסיון הוא לדעתי בעבור היות מעשה האדם רשות מוחלטת בידו אם ירצה יעשה ואם לא ירצה לא יעשה יקרא "נסיון" מצד המנוסה אבל המנסה יתברך יצוה בו להוציא הדבר מן הכח אל הפועל להיות לו שכל מעשה טוב לא שכל טוב בלבד ... והנה כל הנסיונות שבתורה לטובת המנוסה

*The issue of this test, in my opinion, shows that a person has the absolute authority to perform an action; one can do what they want, and not do what one doesn't want. It is called a "nisayon" [test] for the individual being tested [e.g., Avraham], but the blessed Tester will command him to bring out the thing from ability to actuality, giving a reward for a good action and not just a reward for a good heart. ... And behold, every test in the Torah is for the good of the one being tested.*

**Ramban, Bereishis 22:1**

The purpose of a *nisayon* is to bring out the latent potential that exists within a person. Perhaps the purpose of Yom Kippur is indeed to make life a little harder so that we can discover how those very challenges are also a platform to cultivate a close relationship with the Divine — to learn how the challenges of our lives are truly opportunities to shape a meaningful and purposeful existence. If this can be accomplished, then Shabbos becomes part of Yom Kippur as well, and in suspension of the *inuyim*, we would not encounter a remaining echo of *kedushas Shabbos*, since the two dimensions are in fact inseparable.

People sometimes turn to religion in the hope that it is a utopian escape from life. A cocooned space of inspiration and meaning that we can retreat to from the vicissitudes of our lives. In reality what Yom Kippur is teaching us is that the *oneg* (enjoyment) and *simcha* of Shabbos can be experienced through the pain and challenge of *inuy* as well. In this way, it is a day when we can utilize life's challenges as a foundation for growth.



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# In The Footsteps of Avraham Avinu: The Process of Change in the Attainment of Teshuva

**D**uring the season leading up to the Yamim Noraim, there is much focus on teshuva and change. On a basic level, each of us are called upon to take an accounting of where we stand in our observance and faith, and to commit ourselves to fewer sins and greater merits in the year ahead. On a deeper and more holistic level, we are encouraged during this season of teshuva to shed whatever brings each of us down, so that we may actualize the potential that lies within. Whether this means stepping up to a role of leadership in our communities and our families, or even just taking the reins of our own lives, transformation in Tishrei is about recognizing what each of us is capable of, and settling for nothing less.

## **The Halachic Calendar: The Inherent Dilemma about Behavioral Change**

The very nature of the Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur season illustrates an interesting conflict with regard to the Torah approach to change. We ask ourselves: What can I take on? What can I do better? What must I atone for, and determine to do differently in the coming year? When we stand in individual and collective prayer, saying *s'lach lanu, m'chal lanu, kaper*



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*lanu* — forgive us, absolve us, grant us atonement — we are beseeching God and also ourselves. With those words, each of us proclaims, “I fully intend to be a reformed person in the new year. Please God, consider me not as the person I am, but as the person I want to be.”

And yet we know that each year we stand in shul with the changes we intended to make last year at least partially unfulfilled. While we are sincere in our desire for *teshuva sheleima*, complete or perfect teshuva, we also acknowledge that there will always be more work for us to do. The message here, we believe, is that change is inherent in Judaism. The very fact that there is a system of teshuva, and that there is this very specific time period built into our calendar every year, tells us that teshuva is meant to be a process that is life-long, never quite complete.

In the following pages, we will examine modern-day psychology’s view on behavioral change and personal transformation, and how it conforms with the Torah’s framework for change. To that end, we will analyze the narrative of one of the most transformational leaders in our nation’s history, Avraham Avinu. Avraham was a leader who underwent significant personal change in order to accomplish tremendous goals. Transforming himself from a passive observer to a leader of his family, and ultimately his nation, Avraham introduced a whole new philosophy into the world. His road to these changes was complex and deep, and was marked by a constant interplay of divine revelation and intentional behavioral change. While Avraham certainly possessed personal qualities that made him uniquely suited to this incredible responsibility, it is our belief that Avraham’s story reveals



universal truths about the path to change, which are teachable examples for us all.

### The Transtheoretical Model of Change: Change in Stages

Also known as “stages of change,” the Transtheoretical Model (TTM) describes a process involving progress through a series of stages (Prochaska and Velicer). Developed by Prochaska and Di Clemente in 1977, this model delineates six discrete stages that make up the complete experience of individual change. Those are: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination.

In the precontemplation stage, an individual is not yet ready for change, and is not yet thinking about a particular change as part of his or her future. This person may be unaware that his or her behavior is problematic, and is not intending to take action in the foreseeable future. In the next stage, contemplation, we begin to see the precursors of movement. Individuals in this stage are beginning to recognize that their behavior


is problematic, and are starting to look at the pros and cons of their current actions. We can think of these individuals as on the cusp, getting ready to activate a transformation in the near future.

Once an individual arrives at the preparation stage, he or she is ready. He is intending to take action in the immediate future, and may begin taking small steps toward behavioral change. These early, incremental first steps may be small, but their impact is large. They help propel this individual into the next stage, which is action. Individuals in the action stage are making specific, overt modifications to their behaviors. When these changes are made and sustained for at least six months, we consider this individual in the maintenance stage. He may now shift his attention to working to prevent relapse. Finally, the termination stage is reached when an individual has no residual temptation and is sure that he will not return to his old unhealthy ways.

Often when we think of change, we think only of the end product, focusing all our attention on the

visible results. This conception of change is ill advised. In fact, change tends not to occur in a vacuum. Rarely if ever do we experience a singular flash of inspiration that then spurs a transformation that stands the test of time. Real change is built in stages and arrived at slowly. And in fact, even thinking about and engaging with the possibility of change is a step in the process which, if we stay on course, can ultimately bring us to achieve our goals.

The story of Avraham is no exception. Looking at the narrative presented to us in Tanach, it is easy to hone in on a few blockbuster events and be fooled into thinking that they alone were responsible for Avraham’s growth as a leader. Hashem tells Avraham (Bereishit 12:1), “*lech lecha*” — go forth (to the Land which I will show you) — and Avraham goes, leaving behind his old life. But in fact, those “*lech lecha*” moments are pieces of a far vaster story. Those moments of divine intervention were there, and surely they were significant in their impact, but they were preceded by, and precursors of, behavioral changes that Avraham made. Examining the



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narrative more closely, it is clear that Avraham's transformation was not instantaneous and did not stem from a single source. Just the contrary. Avraham grew into the leader he was via change that was slow, developmental, and transactional.

The Rambam in *Hilchot Avodat Kochavim* 1:3 paints a rich story of Avraham's path to the point of "*lech lecha*." Avraham began to question the status quo in Terach's house very early on. At a young age, Avraham realized that it did not make sense to worship idols, and began looking for a master of the universe.

According to the *Midrash HaGadol* 11:28, he first believed that it was the sun, only to realize that the sun sets and the moon comes out. Following that thought process, he began to disqualify every tangible source of power that he could conceive of, ultimately concluding that there is one Supreme Being who must have created all the others.

In *Bereshit Rabba* (*Parshat Noach*, parsha 30) there is a disagreement regarding Avraham's age when he discovered Hashem:

רבי לוי בשם ריש לקיש אמר בן ג' שנים הכיר  
אברהם את בוראו וכו' ר' חנינא ור' יוחנן  
תרוויהון אמרין בן ארבעים וח' שנה הכיר  
אברהם את בוראו.

*R. Levi said in the name of Reish Lakish, Avraham was 3 years old when he recognized his creator ... R. Chanina and R. Yochanan say that Avraham was 48 years old when he recognized his creator.*

There seems to be a dispute as to whether Avraham was 3 or 48 when he recognized HaShem. Which one is it? The *Kesef Mishneh* (who notes that Rambam's version of the midrash is 40 rather than 48) solves the dilemma by stating that it can be both:

והגהות כתבו בשם הרמ"ך שאפשר לקיים זה  
זה דבן שלש שנים היה כשהתחיל לחשוב  
ולשוטט במחשבתו להכיר בוראו אבל כשהיה  
בן ארבעים השלים להכירו. ורבינו כתב העיקר  
שהוא גמר ההיכרא דהיינו כשהיה בן ארבעים.

*In the glosses, it is written in the name of Ramach that it is possible to maintain both opinions. He was 3 years old when he began to think and contemplate how to recognize his creator but when he turned 40, he completed his quest. [Rambam] wrote 40, which is the most important age because it is when he completed his recognition.*

**Kesef Mishneh, Hilchot Avodat Kochavim 1:3**

Put in psychological terms, Avraham spent his early years in contemplation, and arrived at a state of readiness when he took action. Avraham began teaching and inspiring others, transforming himself into a leader within his community.

### **Consistent Action as a Linchpin for Lasting Change**

After many years spent in contemplation of change, it is telling that a major boost in transformation came after Avraham's "*lech lecha*" moment. Cognitive behavioral principles instruct that our feelings result from our thoughts and behaviors. Whereas we often think that it is our emotions that drive our behavior (I am not comfortable leading, and therefore I don't act as a leader), cognitive behavioral psychology explains that it is actually our behaviors that perpetuate our emotional state (because I do not rise to lead, I do not think of myself as "leadership material"). As such, in order to bring about emotional transformation, one must start with simple behavioral change. More specifically, in order to achieve real

transformation, one must begin to act not as he presently is, but as he wishes to be. (Deacon and Abramowitz, 2004)

Looking at the story of Avraham, change in action and change in perception went hand in hand. Avraham spent many years thinking about God, but his transformation was largely confined to his personal internal experience. This all changed when Avraham took overt behavioral steps, signaling that he was ready for more pervasive transformation. When Avraham took action in Terach's house, when he forcibly showed his family that idol worship is foolish, that is when we start to see Avraham acting as the leader that we now know him to be. In order to solidify his transformation, Avraham had to leave his home, change his environment and act in a way that was conducive to his new mission. And in fact, it was after making these tangible changes, that the pace of Avraham's transformation increased even more. Avraham really starts hearing from God, with God telling him "*lech lecha*," commanding him to act again. Now, Avraham is no longer just thinking or talking about God. Now he is acting in accordance with God's word, actualizing the character that God intended him to be.

The actions required to make change happen can be small, but they need to be meaningful and consistent, realistic and specific. They need to coalesce to create an environment that is conducive to the change being sought. In doing so, they set the wheels in motion, driving the individual into the action stage, where the bulk of his transformation will occur. The same applies to the process of teshuva or personal growth. One must set

realistic spiritual goals, paired with specific behavioral changes that will bring him to attainment. Whether it be by setting up a chavruta, joining an online learning community or changing one's schedule to allow for davening, an individual seeking spiritual growth must set up his environment so that it is conducive to reinforcing this change.

## Change as Commitment

In the Transtheoretical Model, the last and final stage of behavioral change is that of maintenance. In order for change to be long lasting, one must commit to a new habit to replace the old. In some ways, this stage can be the most challenging. After the early excitement of achieving one's goals begins to wane, maintenance requires unyielding diligence and ongoing commitment. In this regard too, we can learn from Avraham. As discussed by Rabbi Baruch Simon in his shiur "Change/Commitment in Avodas Hashem," the Gemarah in *Berachot* states that one who sets up a *makom kavua*, a set place to pray, is going to be protected by the G-d of Avraham.

אמר רבי חלבו אמר רב הונא: כל הקובע מקום לתפלתו - אלקי אברהם בעזרו. וכשמת - אומרים לו: אי ענין, אי חסיד, מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו!

*R. Chelbo said in the name of R. Huna: Anyone who sets a place to pray has the G-d of Avraham in his midst. And when he dies, we say to him, what a humble person, what a pious person. He is a student of Avraham Avinu.*

### Berachot 6b

The Gemara indicates that Avraham was known for always davening at the same time, in the same place. This is striking because we have been talking about Avraham as a symbol of change and transformation, not of regularity

or consistency. However, what maintained Avraham's transformation was his commitment to regular and consistent practice. When it comes to our own teshuva, it is our persistent determination to stay the course that will ensure our lasting success. It is when our new behavior becomes one of routine, that we know that it will stick.

## Ambivalence in Change

So often, we mistakenly think of change as a process that occurs in a straight, linear trajectory, with no bumps or dips along the way. In reality, the path to change is never

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think of change as a  
process that occurs in a  
straight, linear trajectory,  
with no bumps or dips  
along the way. In reality,  
the path to change is  
never straight

straight, and one especially valuable aspect of the Transtheoretical Model is the room it leaves for doubt, or fluctuations in our motivation. Avraham too had moments of doubt. For example, Rabbeinu Bechaya comments that when Avraham got to Canaan, he was hesitant and nervous about building his tent in the middle of the Canaanites.

והכנעני אז בארץ. על דרך הפשט הכנעניים אומה חזקה היו יושבי הארץ ההיא, ולפי שהיה אברהם מפחד מהם הרבה בהיותו עובר בארצם, ע"כ לא היה בונה מזבח עד שבא אל מקום שכם ונראה לו ה' ית'.

*And the Canaanite was in the land at that time: The plain meaning of these words is that the Canaanite, a powerful people, dominated that land at that time. Avraham was afraid of them and this is why we did not hear of his building an altar, i.e. preaching his religion, at that time until God appeared to him at Shechem.*

### Rabbeinu Bechaya, Bereishit 12:6

In telling us of this worry, the Torah seems to highlight the fact that even Avraham Avinu displayed some ambivalence about his ability to fulfill God's plan for him. In fact, even as he was being led by God, Avraham's transformation was gradual, and he continued to seek divine reassurance that he could do what was being asked of him.

God did reassure Avraham, and Avraham followed His command. Following in the word of God, even in the face of his own self-doubt, Avraham created a space for continued divine intervention in his life. What started out as a dance between Avraham and his environment grew into an interaction between Avraham and God. Avraham continued on this transformative path, taking every opportunity that God put before him and using them to propel him to transform himself and his nation.

Avraham's story presents an uplifting model for those of us attempting teshuva. When we hear the first shofar blasts as the month of Elul begins, how motivated are we, really? And how confident are we that we will be able to succeed? In reality, our confidence and motivation will likely wax and wane. Fortunately, seen in the context of the Transtheoretical Model, a temporary failure to progress in change is not an absolute failure. Instead, our ambivalence or hesitation



is an indication that we are presently on an earlier stage than we had thought or hoped.

### **Intentional Change Theory: Returning to One's Core**

In addition to the Transtheoretical Model, there is another theory of change that provides a beautiful supplement to our understanding of this process, particularly as it relates to teshuva. Developed by Richard Boyatzis, Intentional Change Theory centers around the assumption that each of us has a core, or ideal self (Boyatzis and Akrivou, 2006). Both privately conceptualized and socially influenced, an individual's sense of ideal self results from his own personal vision of who he really is, and who he wants to be. According to this theory, real transformation can occur only when an individual knows what he hopes to accomplish for his future, and has a sense of self efficacy, or a belief that he has the ability to achieve his goals.

Intentional Change Theory states that a person will make lasting changes if he is motivated by the idea that these changes are returning him to who he truly is, at his core. Whereas change that results from fear or avoidance may happen quickly, those changes will not be nearly as long lasting. For example, if I only stopped speeding because I got a ticket, then next week I will likely find myself speeding again. However, change that is not simply reactive, not simply a response to an external punisher, has the potential to be much more meaningful. When a person works toward reaching what he believes is his own core self, he feels excitement and positive energy. This is the ultimate

intrinsic motivation, and leads to long-lasting change that is deeply transformational.

This idea is consistent with our concept of teshuva. Teshuva literally means "to return." Our goal should not be to change who we are entirely, but to actualize each of our own potential. Change does not "stick" if one is trying to be someone else — that is something that is done out of fear or self-hatred, and will not produce healthy, lasting results. Our goal in our pursuit of teshuva is to return to the ideal state that each of us is meant to be.

Again, we see an allusion to this concept in the steps of Avraham's transformation. "*Lech lecha*," literally translated as "go to yourself," can be understood as an instructive to go toward who you are already (*Kli Yakar*, Bereishit 12:1). Avraham's tests were designed by God to elicit the tremendous potential that was always at his core. The Ramban teaches:

(א) והאלקים נסה את אברהם - ענין הנסיון הוא לדעת, בעבור היות מעשה האדם רשות מוחלטת בידו, אם ירצה יעשה ואם לא ירצה לא יעשה, יקרא "נסיון" מצד המנוסה, אבל המנסה יתברך יצוה בו להוציא הדבר מן הכח אל הפועל, להיות לו שכר מעשה טוב לא שכר לב טוב בלבד.

*And God tested Avraham: The issue of this test is, in my opinion, shows that a person has the absolute authority to perform an action; one can do what they want, and not do what one doesn't want. It is called a "nissayon" [test] for the individual being tested [e.g., Avraham], but the blessed Tester will command him to bring out the thing from ability to actuality, giving a reward for a good action and not just a reward for a good heart.*

**Ramban, Bereishit 22:1**

Avraham had a sense early on that he was not meant to worship idols with the society around him. He had internal surety about who he was, and who he was meant to be, which spurred him to execute behavioral changes. Much of the change he achieved was about awakening his internal potential.

In Elul, we use the shofar as one tool to wake us up, to bring us back to our core. The powerful last blast of the shofar, in the last moment of the Yom Kippur service, is meant to spur within us a moment of clarity, where each of us is awakened as to who we really are. Our challenge then, is to take that gift of inspiration, take that moment where our potential feels revealed, and turn it into something long lasting. As Avraham did, we must follow that moment of inspiration with behavioral change. In doing so, we set the stage for lasting transformation in the new year.

May this Yamim Noraim season bring each of us many moments of insight. May we take those moments and use them as a catalyst for real behavioral change, so that we may transform our core self into our lived self, in the year to come.

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# Ahavat Hashem and Talmud Torah: The Telos of Teshuva

In the final chapter of the *Laws of Repentance*, the Rambam has a variety of famous and beautiful formulations regarding *ahavat Hashem*:<sup>2</sup>

(ב) העובד מאהבה עוסק בתורה ובמצוות והולך בנתיבות החכמה... מפני שהוא אמת וסוף הטובה לבא בגללה, ומעלה זו היא מעלה גדולה מאד ואין כל חכם זוכה לה, והיא מעלת אברהם אבינו שקראו הקדוש ברוך הוא אוהבו לפי שלא עבד אלא מאהבה... (ג) וכיצד היא האהבה הראויה הוא שיאהב את ה' אהבה גדולה יתירה עזה מאוד עד שתהא נפשו קשורה באהבת ה' ונמצא שוגה בה תמיד כאלו חולה חולי האהבה... והוא ששלמה אמר דרך משל כי חולת אהבה אני, וכל שיר השירים משל הוא לענין זה.

2) One who serves [God] out of love occupies himself in the Torah and the mitzvot and walks in the paths of wisdom ... because it is true, and ultimately, good will come because of it. This is a very high level which is not merited by every wise man. It is the level of our Patriarch, Abraham, whom God described as, "he who loved Me," for his service was only motivated by love...

3) What is the proper [degree] of love? That a person should love God with a very great and exceeding love until his soul is bound up in the love of God. Thus, he will always be obsessed with this love as if he is lovesick ... This concept was implied by Solomon [Song of Songs 2:5] when he stated, as a metaphor: "I am lovesick." [Indeed,] the totality of the Song of Songs is a parable describing [this love].

**Hilkhot Teshuva 10:2-3**  
(Translation: Chabad.org)



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The Rambam then addresses the progression from performing a mitzva for ulterior motives to doing it for correct reasons. The Rambam concludes *Hilkhot Teshuva*, and by extension *Sefer Mada*, with this concept. It is fascinating that he then transitions into *Sefer Ahava*, which he begins with the motto of *mah ahavti toratekha kol ha-yom hi sihati* — how much do I love your Torah, it is [the subject of] my constant conversation. The Rambam thereby conjoins the first two books of the *Mishne Torah* with the notion of *ahavat Hashem*. Why did the Rambam conclude *Sefer Mada*, and more importantly *Hilkhot Teshuva*, with a chapter devoted to *ahavat Hashem*?

Furthermore, it is particularly noteworthy and surprising that the Rambam devised and devoted an independent 10-chapter section to the laws of *teshuva* — which are scattered throughout the Talmud without any cohesion — as the culmination of the first of the 14 books of the *Yad ha-Hazaka*, his comprehensive and masterful halakhic magnum opus. The Rambam particularly expanded, reorganized, and invested pioneering

effort in the formulation of these laws. Moreover, why did the Rambam specifically place *Hilkhot Teshuva* in *Sefer Mada*, foregoing the more obvious alternative of locating these laws in a narrower, if more obvious classification, such as *Hilkhot Shegagot*, *Avodat Yom ha-Kippurim*, or *Hilkhot Shevitat Asor* in *Sefer Zemanim*? The determination that *Hilkhot Teshuva* is pivotal to *Sefer Mada*, and even its appropriate coda, certainly requires clarification. It adds greater urgency to understanding this puzzling choice of dedicating the final chapter of *Hilkhot Teshuva* and all of *Sefer Mada* to the mitzva of *ahavat Hashem*.

These questions are compounded by the fact that the Rambam already codifies *ahavat Hashem* in *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* (2:1-2) at the beginning of *Sefer Mada*, together with the theological truths that a person is required to affirm to qualify as a believing Jew.<sup>3</sup> It is striking that, despite the Rambam already having addressed the concepts of *ahava* and *yira* at the very beginning of *Sefer Mada*,<sup>4</sup> he feels compelled to return to them at the culmination of *Sefer Mada* in *Hilkhot Teshuva*.

## Resolution of the Rambam

A close examination of *Hilkhot Teshuva* reveals the Rambam's intentions. The Rambam dedicates the final chapter of *Hilkhot Teshuva* to the mitzva of *ahavat Hashem* in order to emphasize that the ultimate goal of teshuva is *ahavat Hashem*. It cannot be a coincidence that the Rambam chose the culmination of *Hilkhot Teshuva* to ruminate about *ahavat Hashem* and the motivation and ambition that both suffuse and engender it. By accentuating the importance of *ahavat Hashem*, by promoting it as an ideal, and by utilizing the metaphor of intense romantic love found in *Shir ha-Shirim*, the Rambam effectively conveys that *ahavat Hashem* is of paramount importance as a key to all elements of *avodat Hashem*. Simply put, the Rambam's unusual presentation reflects his profound comprehension that *ahavat Hashem* is the ultimate telos of teshuva. In turn, he thereby accentuates a perspective that undergirds his entire presentation and classification of *Hilkhot Teshuva*, and informs and reinforces his classificatory decision. For the Rambam, teshuva is a necessary, natural component of *Sefer Mada* and *Mishne Torah* more broadly, and a mode of *avodat Hashem* in and of

itself. Teshuva is not exclusively about neutralizing *chet* (sin), but is instead an act of *avodat Hashem* that leads to the highest level of religiosity.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the Rambam's decision to place *Hilkhot Teshuva* in *Sefer Mada* is even intuitive because his goal is to integrate teshuva with *avodat Hashem* throughout the year. Teshuva is not just a narrow response to sin, but is itself a pinnacle of *avodat Hashem*, and therefore an obvious choice for the culmination of *Sefer Mada*. Additionally, the Rambam's choice to conjoin *Hilkhot Teshuva* with *Sefer Ahava* via the concept of *ahavat Hashem* flows consistently from this perspective. The transition to daily mitzvot, which are described in *Sefer Ahava*, reinforces these themes and accentuates the broader relationship between man and Hashem that is also a key component of the process of teshuva. *Hilkhot Teshuva*, at the culmination of *Sefer Mada*, is juxtaposed with the *Laws of Keriyat Shema* at the beginning of *Sefer Ahava*. The *Laws of Keriyat Shema* encapsulate the comprehensiveness of *ahavat Hashem* — “*bekhol levavekha, bekhol nafshekha, bekhol me'odekha*” — and capture the mission of total religious and halakhic commitment — *kabalat ol malkhut shamayim*. The juxtaposition of the *Laws of Keriyat*

*Shema* with *Hilkhot Teshuva* further broadens the motif of teshuva and integrates it into the other primary institutions of *avodat Hashem*.<sup>6</sup>

## Rambam's Consistency on Ahavat Hashem

The Rambam's approach to *ahavat Hashem* is very consistent. In *Laws of Repentance* (10:2), he refers to Avraham Avinu as the exemplar of *ahavat Hashem*, invoking the verse “Avraham who loves Me” (Isaiah 41:8), the same verse he quotes in *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* (Positive Command 3) when he talks about *ahavat Hashem*:

והמצוה השלישית היא שצונו לאהבו יתעלה  
זה שנתבונן ונשכיל מצותיו ופעולותיו עד  
שנשיגהו ונתענג בהשגתו תכלית התענוג  
וזאת היא האהבה המחוייבת... ולשון סיפרי  
(שם) ואהבת את ה' וכו' אהבהו על הבריות  
כאברהם אביך שנאמר ואת הנפש אשר  
עשו בחרן. ר"ל כמו שאברהם בעבור שהיה  
אוהב השם כמו שהעיד הכתוב (ישעי' מא)  
אברהם אוהבי שהיה גם כן לגדל השגתו דרש  
האנשים אל האמונה מחזק אהבתו כן אתה  
אהוב אותו עד שתדרוש האנשים אליך:

*The third mitzva is that we are commanded to love G-d (exalted be He), i.e. to meditate upon and closely examine His mitzvos, His commandments, and His works, in order to understand Him; and through this understanding to*

Teshuva is not just a narrow response to sin, but is itself a pinnacle of *avodat Hashem*, and therefore an obvious choice for the culmination of *Sefer Mada*.





achieve a feeling of ecstasy. This is the goal of the commandment to love G-d ... We see that this mitzvah includes spreading love for G-d to others from] the Sifri: "You shall love G-d, i.e. make Him beloved among the creatures as your father Avraham did, as it is written, 'The souls that he made in Charan.'" The meaning of this Sifri: Avraham, as a result of his deep understanding of G-d, acquired love for G-d, as the verse testifies, "Avraham, who loved Me." This powerful love therefore caused him to call out to all mankind to believe in G-d. So too, you shall love Him to the extent that you draw others to Him.

**Translation: Chabad.org**

Avraham Avinu is the model of *ahavat Hashem* for the Rambam and in *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, he describes a practically uncontrollable impulse, an overflowing sense of *ahava*, which overtakes the person. The Rambam depicts Avraham as the paradigm of an *ohav Hashem*, one whose infectious enthusiasm and exuberance to share Torah with others derived from an overflow of his own intoxication with the *Ribbono shel Olam* and his Torah. The experience begins with a rational awareness, but it goes beyond that and becomes a religious experience. This is the foundation of Avraham Avinu's method and mission. Avraham's outreach activity was part and parcel of being "Avraham who loves Me," reflecting an unrestrained and overflowing sense of purpose resulting from love of the Divine.

## Talmud Torah and Ahavat Hashem

The Rambam articulates unambiguously that the primary mechanism for achieving this state of *ahavat Hashem* is talmud Torah, Torah study. Exposure to the word

of Hashem, both Torah and mitzvot, has a transcendent and transformative impact (if one does not resist it), which ultimately leads to *ahava* and *lishma*, performing mitzvot for the sake of heaven (10:4-6). Hence, Torah study and observance of mitzvot in their own right are also the indispensable foundation for developing *ahavat Hashem* and fostering authentic *avodat Hashem* in the model of Avraham *ohavi* (Avraham who loves Me), the *av hamon goyim* (the father of many nations).

It is surely no coincidence that some commentators suggest<sup>7</sup> that *teshuva me-ahava* (repentance out of love) can be attained primarily through talmud Torah. The connection that the Rambam makes between *ahavat Hashem* and the study of Torah in *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, and in the way he describes the study of Torah in the tenth chapter of *Laws of Repentance*, is absolutely consistent with and reinforcing of this idea.

Moreover, it is likely no coincidence that the verse the Ramban identifies (noting the previous context and *pesukim* in *Nitzavim*) as the source for *teshuva* is:

כי המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוה היום לא  
נפלות הוא ממך ולא רחקה הוא.

*For this commandment which I  
command you this day, it is neither too  
hard for you nor far off.*

**Devarim 30:11**

The Gemara in *Eruvin* (55a, also cited by Rashi) says very explicitly that the verse refers to the mitzva of talmud Torah, and that is how the Rambam codifies it in *Hilkhos Talmud Torah* as well. The Ramban was obviously keenly aware of these normative sources, yet by identifying this verse as the source for *teshuva*, he establishes that Torah study and *teshuva* are two

sides of the same coin. The intimate connection between talmud Torah and *teshuva* supports the notion that talmud Torah is the basis for *teshuva me-ahava*.

This perspective provides a framework for understanding why talmud Torah is so urgent and why it is so important that the undertaking of Torah study is not performed frivolously or even casually. While Torah study should engender joy because "the precepts of Hashem are right, making the heart rejoice" (Psalms 19:9),<sup>8</sup> Torah study should be pursued with reverence and seriousness. The perspective that talmud Torah is the means to connect with the Infinite as the most ambitious expression of *avodat Hashem* precludes a casual, careless, or trivial approach.<sup>9</sup>

Talmud Torah is both the foundation of the marital relationship between us and the *Ribbono shel Olam* and the prime tool for building this relationship.<sup>10</sup> That is why learning Torah is not only equal in importance to all the other mitzvot (*Pe'ah* 1:1), but the way one engages in it is critical as well; Torah study requires mind, heart, and soul, and demands the surrender and subordination of one's mindset and way of thinking to that of the Torah.

This highlights the importance of in-depth Torah study and analysis, which includes trying to uncover the subtleties within a topic and connections between topics. While it provides intellectual exhilaration, the exhilaration engendered by advanced talmud Torah is secondary compared to the spiritual aspiration that accompanies it. At the end of the day, the enthusiasm that we exhibit, the attachment to the topic,

the exploration of the options and the nuances, and the analysis of the expressions of the rishonim and other texts are really about the enthusiastic relationship of *ahavat Hashem*, which not only impacts teshuva but is the basis for *avodat Hashem* and a broader Torah-infused perspective on life.

The people who share the bench in the beit midrash, study partners who learn together, form a bond based on transformative shared experiences. There can and should be abundant joy associated with the creative process, including initiative and personal contribution, but the ultimate goal is a transcendent one: fostering a community built on shared values and the belief in the importance of Torah study.

The Rambam concludes *Hilkhot Teshuva* with *ahavat Hashem* and then he transitions into *Sefer Ahava*. Additionally, every book in *Mishne Torah* of the Rambam is really connected in some way to the mitzva of *ahavat Hashem*. Thus, teshuva is not a concept that is restricted to Elul and the *Aseret Yemei Teshuva*, the Ten Days of Repentance, but it sets the tone for our relationship with Hashem throughout the entire year.<sup>11</sup>

## Endnotes

1 This article is primarily an adaption of a *siha* given by R. Rosensweig at the start of Elul, 5774. The article was reviewed by R. Rosensweig.

2 For the Rambam's full presentation of *ahavat Hashem*, see the entirety of *Laws of Repentance* 10:1-3.

3 For the Rambam, theological truths are essential because philosophical conformity is indispensable to halakhic observance. That is why he starts the entire *Mishne Torah* with *Sefer Mada* and its philosophical axioms. From the most elemental discussions of his foundational theology, the Rambam transitions into *yirat Hashem* and *ahavat Hashem* (*Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:1-2).

4 Additionally, in *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*, the Rambam does not treat each topic separately. In general, the Rambam introduces a mitzva, defines it, and then moves on to the next one. In this instance however, he groups *ahava* and *yira* together and then explains both of them. The Rambam's choice is predicated upon his stated view and belief that there is a seamless and continuous interaction between these two. *Yira* leads to *ahava* and *ahava* leads to *yira* in an ongoing cyclical process. Instead of being two opposite emotions, these are really two parts of one religious experience.

5 The Rambam was likely inspired by a Gemara in *Yoma* (86b), which proclaims that *teshuva me-ahava* transfigures an unintentional transgression into a *zekhut*. Surprisingly, the Rambam, who masterfully compiled and formulated *Hilkhot Teshuva*, seemingly omits and ignores this remarkable assessment and idea that forcefully projects the ambitious capacity of teshuva, a theme that he would seemingly enthusiastically embrace. Moreover, the Rambam quotes many of the *divrei aggadah* collected at the end of *Yoma*, and yet does not codify this particularly noteworthy idea. We may speculate that the Rambam may have actually been providing an interpretation of this unusual Gemara by placing *ahavat Hashem* as the final chapter of *Hilkhot Teshuva*, thereby suggesting that *ahavat Hashem* should not be seen primarily as just the methodology for teshuva, but instead the ultimate goal. I have related to these themes elsewhere in my articles on Elul available at [torahweb.org](http://torahweb.org). See, for example, "Ahavat Hashem: The Teshuva of Chodesh Elul" and "Rambam's view of Ahavat Hashem as the Telos of Teshuvah."

6 Another example of the Rambam broadening the motif of teshuva is his treatment of *behirah hofshit*, a lynchpin concept in *avodat Hashem*, in the middle of *Hilkhot Teshuva* (Chapter 5).

7 See in particular the comments of R. Hayyim Volozhiner in *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* Chapter 4 and the Netziv in *Ha-Emek Davar*, Deut. 4:2.

8 There are a number of strong formulations in rishonim and aharonim that articulate this concept. For example, even though in general there is a concept of *mitzvot lav lehanot nitnu*, R. Avraham min ha-Har (*Nedarim* 48a) argues that this does not apply to talmud Torah because joy is intrinsic to the experience. Additionally, see the introduction of the *Avnei Nezer* to his *sefer Eglei Tal*.

9 See, for example, Talmud Bavli, *Berakhot* (22a).

10 Hazal constantly link *kabbalat ha-Torah* to *erusin* and *nissuin*. See, for example, *Vayikra Rabba* Acharei Mot 20, and *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael*, Parshat Yitro.

11 When we understand teshuva as a process that intensifies the relationship and also provides the perspective that transcends the sin, the otherwise mystifying and intriguing concept of *naaseh ke-zekhuyot* (sins become like merits) can be understood. The reality of sin can be a catalyst for a person to rectify their *avodat Hashem* and their relationship with Hashem more broadly and that catalyst, in some sense, can become a "merit."



Find more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Michael Rosensweig at <http://www.yutorah.org/Rabbi-Michael-Rosensweig>

# Teshuvah: Moving From and Moving Toward

**W**hat is the essential nature of teshuvah? Is the goal to turn away from certain modes of behavior, to master the resistance of various temptations, to desist from specific actions and conduct? To be sure, the answer to all of the above is a resounding yes! When we do teshuvah, especially during the Yomim Noraim season, we try to evaluate the behavior that dominates much of our activity on a day-to-day basis, to commit to overcome the temptations that entice us and lead us to do things wrong, at least from time to time, and to determine to avoid engaging in some of the conduct in which we typically involve ourselves throughout the rest of the year.

A look at a few of the famous pesukim regarding teshuvah confirms this idea:

וַעֲתָה אֶמֶר נָא אֶל אִישׁ יְהוּדָה וְעַל יוֹשְׁבֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם לֵאמֹר כֹּה אָמַר ה' הִנֵּה אֲנִי יוֹצֵר עֲלֵיכֶם רָעָה וְחֹשֵׁב עֲלֵיכֶם מִחֻשְׁבָּה שׁוּבוּ נָא אִישׁ מִדֶּרְכּוֹ הָרָעָה וְהִסְטִיבוּ דְרָכֵיכֶם וּמַעַלְלֵיכֶם:  
*So now, please say to the people of Yehudah and regarding the residents of Yerushalayim, saying: So said Hashem — Behold I am fashioning evil against you and [I am] devising a scheme against you; [therefore] please return, each man from his evil way, and improve your ways and your deeds.*

**Yirmeyahu 18:11**

הֲחָפֵץ אֶחָפֵץ מוֹת רָשָׁע נָאִם ה' אֱלֹקִים הַלּוֹא בְּשׁוּבוֹ מִדֶּרְכָּיו וְחָיָה:  
*Do I desire at all the death of the wicked person? — [this is] the word of Hashem*



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*the Lord — is it not [rather that I desire] his return from his ways that he may live?*

**Yechezkel 18:23**

אָמַר אֱלֹהִים חֵי אֲנִי נָאִם ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶחָפֵץ בְּמוֹת הָרָשָׁע כִּי אִם בְּשׁוּבוֹ רָשָׁע מִדֶּרְכּוֹ וְחָיָה שׁוּבוּ שׁוּבוּ מִדֶּרְכֵיכֶם הָרָעִים וְלִמָּה תָמוּתוּ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל:

*Say to them: As I live — [this is] the word of Hashem, the Lord — [I swear that] I do not desire the death of the wicked person, but rather [I desire] the return of the wicked person from his way that he may live; return, return from your evil ways, for why should you die, O House of Israel!*

**Yechezkel 33:11**

וַיֵּרָא הָאֱלֹקִים אֶת מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כִּי שָׁבוּ מִדֶּרְכָם הָרָעָה וַיִּנָּחַם הָאֱלֹקִים עַל הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר דָּבָר לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה:

*And the Lord saw their deeds [and] that they had returned from their evil way, and the Lord relented concerning the evil which He had said He would do to them, and He did not do it.*

**Yonah 3:10**

All of these pesukim indicate that the goal of teshuvah is to return to Hashem by moving away from (...מ) one's evil paths and from one's misdeeds and thereby avert whatever punishment one might otherwise deserve.

The Rambam, in describing what must be done in order to properly do teshuvah, thus writes in his *Sefer HaMitzvos* (*Mitzvas Aseih* 73), that one must verbally confess and acknowledge the sins and transgressions that he has committed in the past and then ask Hashem for forgiveness; the *Sefer HaChinuch* (*Mitzvah* 364) makes a similar presentation. In his introduction to *Hilchos Teshuvah* in his *Mishneh Torah*, the Rambam likewise declares that the mitzvah associated with teshuvah is to repent from one's sinful ways and confess before Hashem. Simply put, the goal of teshuvah is to distance oneself from one's past actions and attitudes, and, as the Rambam then stresses in beginning *Hilchos Teshuvah* (1:1), one must verbalize not only what he has done, but his regrets and his embarrassment as well, a notion that may be rooted in a passage in the *Yerushalmi* in *Taanis* (1:1), where an individual who wished to do teshuvah for having spoken excessive lashon hara is told that he must begin by regretting his past conduct.

Perhaps the clearest formulation of this understanding of teshuvah is found in the words of the Rambam a bit later:



above) reveals this other category of teshuvah:

וְשִׁבְתָּ עַד ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ וְשָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹל כָּל אֲשֶׁר  
אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם אֶתְּהָ וּבִנְיָד בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל  
נַפְשְׁךָ:

*And you shall return to Hashem  
your Lord and listen to His voice in  
accordance with all that I command you  
today, you and your children, with all  
your heart and with all your soul.*

**Devarim 30:2**

מְחִיתִי כְעָב פֶּשְׁעֶיךָ וְכַעֲנָן חַטֹּאוֹתֶיךָ שׁוֹבָה אֵלַי  
כִּי גָאֻלְתִּיךָ:

*I have wiped away your transgressions  
like a mist and your sins like a cloud;  
return to Me for I have redeemed you.*

**Yeshaya 44:22**

שׁוֹבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ כִּי כָשַׁלְתָּ בְּעֵינֶיךָ:  
קָחוּ עִמָּכֶם דְּבָרִים וְשׁוּבוּ אֵל ה' אֲמָרוּ אֵלָיו כֹּל  
תִּשְׂאָ עֹן וְקָח טוֹב וְנִשְׁלָמָה פְּרִים שְׁפָתֵינוּ:

*Return, O Israel, to Hashem your Lord,  
for you have stumbled in your iniquity.  
Take words with you and return to  
Hashem; say to Him: Forgive all iniquity  
and accept [our] good [intentions], and  
let [the words of] our lips replace the  
[offering of] bulls.*

**Hosheia 14:2-3**

וְגַם עַתָּה נֹאֵם ה' שְׁבוּ עָדֵי בְּכָל לְבָבְכֶם וּבְצוּם  
וּבִבְכִי וּבְמִסְפָּד: וְקִרְעוּ לְבָבְכֶם וְאַל בְּגִדֵיכֶם  
וְשׁוּבוּ אֵל ה' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם כִּי חֲנוּן וְרַחוּם הוּא אֲרָךְ  
אֲפִים וְרַב חֶסֶד וְנֶחֱם עַל הָרָעָה:

*And even now — [this is] the word  
of Hashem — return to Me with all  
your heart, and with fasting, and with  
weeping, and with lamentation. And  
rend your hearts and not your garments,  
and return to Hashem your Lord, for He  
is gracious and merciful, slow to anger,  
great in kindness, and He relents from  
[doing] evil.*

**Yoel 2:12-13**

All of these pesukim indicate that the purpose of teshuvah is to move toward (...עד or ...אל) a particular goal, namely, a close connection or identification

ומה היא התשובה הוא שיעזוב החוטא חטאו ויסירו ממחשבתו ויגמור בלבו שלא יעשה עוד שנאמר יעזוב רשע דרכו וגו', וכן יתנחם על שעבר שנאמר כי אחרי שובי נחמתי, ויעיד עליו יודע תעלומות שלא ישוב לזה החטא לעולם שנאמר ולא נאמר עוד אלקינו למעשה ידינו וגו', וצריך להתודות בשפתיו ולומר עניינות אלו שגמר בלבו.

*And what is teshuvah? It is [what is attained] when a sinner abandons his sin, removes it from his thoughts, and concludes in his mind that he will not do it again, as it is stated (Yeshayah 55:7), let the wicked person abandon his way, etc. And [the sinner] likewise should regret the fact that he transgressed, as it is stated (Yirmeyahu 31:18), For after [beginning] my return, I regretted. Moreover, [his resolve should be such that] he should be able to call He Who knows all that is hidden as a witness that he will never return to this sin ever again, as it is written (Hosheia 14:4), nor will we ever again call our handiwork "our gods," etc. And he must verbally confess and declare these matters which he has concluded in his mind.*

**Hilchos Teshuvah 2:2**

It is true that the Rambam, both there and in the first halachah cited above, stresses not only looking back at the past, but also looking toward the future and making a commitment not to engage in sinful activity again. This idea is actually articulated earlier by Rav Saadyah Gaon (*HaEmunos VeHaDeos* 5:5), who speaks of four parts of the teshuvah process, including abandoning the particular behavior, regretting it, requesting atonement, and accepting upon himself not to do it again. Others who mention these different steps, likewise pointing out the need for a commitment regarding the future, include the *Chovos HaLevavos* (*Sha'ar HaTeshuvah* Chapter 4) and Rabbeinu Yonah in his *Sha'arei Teshuvah* (1:19-

20), the latter stressing that one must do what one can to eliminate whatever internal motivations may exist that led him to sin in the first place.

But even in discussing the future, the emphasis here is on the deeds — or misdeeds — of the past. In order to do proper teshuvah, one must be determined to discontinue, from here forward, his behavior of the past. His need to accept upon himself a commitment about the future relates to the avoidance of the act or acts of the past. Teshuvah thus remains, in this sense, an enterprise that focuses on the past; when one engages in teshuvah, one acknowledges and regrets the mistakes of the past and commits not to repeat them. In short, when one does teshuvah, one moves "away from."

There is, however, an additional dimension to teshuvah; there is a teshuvah where the entire focus is on the future, where the goal is to create something new that may not now exist, at least in the way that we should want it to. When we do this sort of teshuvah, we are looking to start over again with a renewed sense of purpose, to begin a new chapter in life in terms of our observance of Torah and mitzvos, to build a relationship with the Ribbono shel Olam. Again especially during the Yomim Noraim season, we do teshuvah in order to reestablish our connection with Hashem, to rekindle a passion and an excitement that may have diminished, and to recommit and reinvigorate ourselves regarding the lifestyle that He has set forth for us. This type of teshuvah points us toward something rather than away from something.

An examination of the following famous pesukim (especially contrasting them with those cited

with Hashem Himself. The nature of this closeness, and whether this is attainable by an individual doing teshuvah or is perhaps dependent upon the communal involvement of the *tzibbur*, may be the subject of a dispute in the Gemara in *Yoma* (86b); it is certainly understood as such by Rabbeinu Chananel and the *Bach* (in his *Hagahos*, No. *Aleph*) on the page there, and is likewise presented that way in the *Yalkut Shimoni* to *Hosheia* (Volume 2 No. 730; see also the presentation of the sugya in the *Ein Yaakov* there, and see Maharsha, *Chidushei Aggados* there *d.h. Ad kisei hakavod*). In any case, though, it is clear that one of the major goals of proper teshuvah is the achievement of a sense of closeness to Hashem.

Once again, the words of the Rambam most clearly articulate the essence of this type of teshuvah:

גדולה תשובה שמקרבת את האדם לשכינה... כלומר אם תחזור בתשובה בי תדבק. התשובה מקרבת את הרחוקים, אמר היה זה שנאמר לפני המקום משוקץ ומרוחק ותועבה, והיום הוא אהוב ונחמד קרוב וידיד... כמה מעולה מעלת התשובה, אמר היה זה מובדל מה' אלוקי ישראל... צועק ואינו נענה... ועושה מצות וטורפין אותו בפניו... והיום הוא מודבק בשכינה... צועק ונענה מיד... ועושה מצות ומקבלין אותו בנחת ושמחה... ולא עוד אלא שמתאווים להם...

*Great is [the power of] teshuvah, for it brings a person to the Divine Presence ... that is to say, [Hashem says that] if you return [to Me] with [proper] teshuvah, you will [be able to] cleave to Me. Teshuvah brings close those who are far away; yesterday (i.e., before doing teshuvah), this person was [considered] hated before the Omnipresent — disgusting, distant, and abominable. But today (i.e., after having done teshuvah), he is loved, desirable, close — a friend.*

*How exalted are the benefits of teshuvah!*

*Yesterday, this person was alienated from Hashem, the Lord of Israel ... he would cry out and not be responded to ... he would fulfill commandments and they would be thrown back in his face ... But today, he is attached to the Divine Presence ... he cries out and is responded to immediately ... and he fulfills commandments and they are accepted with pleasure and joy... and not only that but there is a longing for them...*

### **Hilchos Teshuvah 7:6-7**

It may be noted, as pointed out by R. Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor (in the introduction to his *Teshuvos Ein Yitzchak*, *Pesach HaSha'ar* No. 47), that the Rambam does not distinguish there between an individual and the *tzibbur*, implying that even an individual who does teshuvah properly can attain this lofty level. Rabbeinu Yonah, in his *Sha'arei Teshuvah* (1:9), likewise asserts that there are many levels of teshuvah, and how close the person will indeed come to Hashem depends upon the level of his teshuvah. The point is, though, that a person can, through teshuvah, forge a new relationship with Hashem. Teshuvah in this sense is an enterprise that focuses on the future, and when one does this type of teshuvah, one moves “toward.”

It is relatively easy to understand (if not necessarily to accomplish) what one must do to engage in the first type of teshuvah discussed here — namely, as outlined by the authorities cited above, to recognize one's transgression, regret it, verbalize his confession, and commit to avoid repeating it in the future. What must be done, however, to achieve the goal of the second type of teshuvah — establishing a closeness with Hashem — is less obvious. What exactly should one be doing in order

to build this desired relationship? The question is further compounded by the fact that, as indicated later by Rabbeinu Yonah (*Sha'arei Teshuvah* 1:42), one can be successful in terms of the first goal — that is, his past transgressions can be forgiven and any punishments previously deserved set aside — but yet still not be anywhere near where he wants to be in terms of his connection to Hashem. What, then, should this person be doing?

In describing the general human condition as it relates to one's status in the eyes of Hashem, the Rambam tells us:

כל אחד ואחד מבני האדם יש לו זכיות ועונות, מי שזכיותיו יתירות על עונותיו צדיק, ומי שעונותיו יתירות על זכיותיו רשע, מחצה למחצה בינוני...

*Each and every human being has merits and iniquities; one whose merits outnumber his iniquities is [called] a tzaddik, and one whose iniquities outnumber his merits is [called] a rasha, [one whose merits and iniquities are] half and half [that is, they are equal], is [called] a beinoni.*

### **Hilchos Teshuvah 3:1**

We might wonder what exactly the Rambam here is teaching us. Why does it matter what a person is called — whether a *tzaddik*, a *rasha*, or a *beinoni*? Why does the Rambam make a point of stressing the individual's status — what difference does that make? Perhaps we may suggest that the Rambam is actually instructing us as to how to be a *tzaddik*, a *rasha*, or a *beinoni*. Contrary to what may be popular belief, a *tzaddik* is not some perfectly behaved person who does not sin and never does anything wrong. Indeed, the pasuk in *Koheles* (7:20) affirms that no such individual exists. The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (46b) derives from here that even someone

who is considered a *tzaddik* thus requires the atonement brought about by *keverah*, while a later Gemara there (101a) adds that even the greatest of people who meticulously observe the entire Torah err and sin as well.

Instead, the Rambam asserts, a *tzaddik* is somebody who may have sins to his name — perhaps even many sins — but he has even more mitzvos and merits. A *tzaddik* is someone who on balance is closer to Hashem than he is far from Him. He may make mistakes and do things that are wrong, but his overall trajectory, based on the totality of his deeds, is toward Hashem and not away from him.

This same point is made by Tosafos to *Rosh HaShanah* (16b, d.h. *VeNechtamin*), where we likewise learn that a *tzaddik* is defined as someone who has more merits than demerits, and not someone who has no demerits at all. As an aside, the fact that the term “*tzaddik*” can have this broader connotation and is not applied (exclusively) to one who is completely, or almost completely, free of sin, may be seen from statements in the Torah itself. In these statements, we find that someone who is “in the right” regarding a particular circumstance is called a *tzaddik*, even though that title may not accurately describe his general conduct (see Shemos 23:7 and Devarim 25:1). The *Lechem Mishneh* in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (3:2) makes this point explicitly.

In our context, then, the term “*tzaddik*” may be understood as a description of a person who is pointed in a certain direction, who is headed along a certain path, who is moving toward a certain goal. An individual who seeks a relationship with Hashem and thus works to make sure that he is generally doing what is right in His eyes, who wants to observe the

mitzvos and avoid transgressions and works hard to make that happen, and who strives for perfection in his service of Hashem, may be said to be a *tzaddik* even though he actually falls far short of that perfection. He is a *tzaddik* because of the path that he is on as evidenced by his overall behavior. One who wishes to attain the second category of teshuvah must conscientiously place himself on that path and see that he stays on it.

With this in mind, we may be better able to understand three famous but otherwise difficult Talmudic passages. The first is a Gemara in *Niddah* (30b), which teaches that before a child is born into this world, while yet in his mother’s womb, he is enjoined, with the power of an oath, to be a *tzaddik* and not a *rasha*. If we interpret the words *tzaddik* and *rasha* here in the usual manner, we have to wonder what the purpose of this oath is, as it seems to impose upon everybody an impossible standard — we know in advance that this oath will not be able to be fulfilled! If, however, we assume that a *tzaddik* is a description of someone who has made the choice to follow a specific road and work toward a relationship with Hashem by trying to do more mitzvos and fewer sins, that title is indeed attainable by all.

As explained by the Maharsha there (*Chidushei Aggados*, d.h. *Ve-Amar*), the directive to each child about to be born is to try to maintain the connection with Hashem that the soul had while in the womb, and not to succumb to the *Yeitzer HaRa*. One who tries to maintain that purity may be labeled a *tzaddik* (though it should be noted that the *Ba’al HaTanya*, *Likkutei Amarim Tanya* Chapter 1 understands the term *tzaddik* in this Gemara in the more traditional sense). This may relate to the idea

expressed by the Gemara in *Berachos* (61b) which indicates that the *tzaddik* is controlled by his *Yeitzer Tov*; this does not mean that he does not have any temptations to do evil or even that he does not at times give in, but rather that he is in general under the dominion of the positive influences that point him toward the *Ribbono shel Olam*.

This may also be what the Torah is telling us when it advises us to choose the path of life — *u’vacharta bachaim* (*Devarim* 30:19). What is important is to be on a certain path. The *tzaddik* is the person who has chosen a direction and works on following it closely, resulting not in perfection, but in more accomplishments that further his goals than that detract from it. Finally, this may also be the point emphasized by the Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 3:2), that the reckoning of how many merits and how many demerits one has is not a matter of simple numbers, since there are certain individual good deeds that outweigh many misdeeds, and there are specific transgressions that outweigh many mitzvos. Of course, each mitzvah has its own reward and each sin its own punishment regardless of whatever else is on the individual’s ledger. But what is important overall is the path that the person is on, where he is heading, and what general choices he has made — and to determine that he is moving in the right direction we have to look at the entire picture and not just at individual mitzvos and transgressions.

A second Gemara is found in *Kiddushin* (40b), where we are taught that someone who had been identified as a *tzaddik*, even for a long time, but subsequently rebelled and became a sinner, is considered to have forfeited all the good deeds that he previously



performed. In explaining why this should be the case, the Gemara asserts that it is referring to someone who expressly regrets having done all those good deeds. The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 3:3) rules accordingly. The question, however, still may be asked: Why should that matter — why are all his good deeds erased? The answer may be that what we are looking at is the person's path. Since he is now moving away from a positive relationship with Hashem, he is heading the wrong way and his overall trajectory is downward. It is in that sense that his previous good deeds are irrelevant because he is now moving in a very different direction.

Lastly, a later Gemara in *Kiddushin* (49b) states that if man betroths a woman but says that he is doing so only on the understanding that he is a *tzaddik*, the betrothal is valid even if he has been, up to that point, an absolute *rasha* and not a *tzaddik* by any definition. This is because it is possible that just at that moment, sincere thoughts of teshuvah entered his mind, meaning that he made a mental commitment to change his ways for the better. Many commentators, however, are understandably troubled by this, because even if the man did make a sincere commitment in his mind to do teshuvah, does that already make him a *tzaddik* now? And yet both the Rambam (*Hilchos Ishus* 8:5) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Even HaEzer* 38:31) accept this ruling (although both assert that the betrothal is only doubtfully valid, a status which has its own ramifications, because we cannot know for sure what was in the man's mind). But the question still stands: How can it be valid at all based upon only a (possible) mental commitment if the basic requirements for teshuvah, which include, as described above,

an oral confession, were not fulfilled? How can this person be labeled a *tzaddik*?

The *Minchas Chinuch* (Mitzvah 364 No. 1) famously asserts that we can, in fact, infer from here that even one who does teshuvah mentally can be labeled a *tzaddik*. Maran HaRav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, while not willing to go as far as the *Minchas Chinuch* in assessing this person's status, agrees that by virtue of a person's decision to change his direction in life, he is labeled a *tzaddik* despite the fact that he has not completed the teshuvah process (see *Harerei Kedem*, Volume 1 No. 41 in the revised edition). This is very much in line with our suggestion here that from one perspective, what matters in terms of teshuvah is where one is heading — the road one is presently on — and although the person may now be far from a *tzaddik* in the classic sense, the fact that he is sincerely looking to move toward a relationship with Hashem is already enough to qualify him as a *tzaddik* for certain purposes. It may be added that the *Chelkas Mechokek*, commenting on the aforementioned ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch* (No. 44), appears to concur.

What emerges from all of the above is that there is an aspect of teshuvah that focuses on the path in life upon which one finds oneself, and one who wishes to engage in this aspect of teshuvah must work at making sure that he is indeed heading in that direction. He should be moving along a road toward a close relationship with Hashem by generally increasing the number of mitzvos he performs and decreasing the number of transgressions he does. This is not to say, of course, that a person who does work at assuring that his overall trajectory is in the right direction may ignore the more

technical aspect of teshuvah and not consider his individual sins and seek to expiate them by a verbal confession and everything which that includes. This is certainly not true! It is not enough to simply be on the correct path toward connecting with Hashem and disregard his specific sins. At the same time, though, it is not enough to eliminate one's technical sins and not also work on one's overall path in life. One must engage in both *teshuvah* ...*מ* — from, and *teshuvah* ...*ע* or ...*ל* — toward.

As a postscript, it may be added that when raising and educating children, the same dual obligation should be borne in mind. We all want our children and our students to learn how properly to conduct themselves, to act, to interact, and to carry themselves by engaging in certain specific behaviors and avoiding other specific behaviors. Much time and effort is spent, as it should be, on training children regarding those behaviors. But it is also imperative to impress upon them the need to be on a particular path in life, to be pointed in a certain direction, as opposed to moving vaguely and aimlessly, and to act in accordance with being along that path. The successful parent, grandparent, teacher, mentor, or guide is the one who is able to motivate the student not only to stay away from, but to move toward. And for that to happen, it is insufficient to simply convey rules, though it is certainly necessary to do so. But in addition, one must create a culture, foster an environment, and nurture an atmosphere where the student feels that he or she is not only on a definitive path, but is proud of it and will eventually want on his own to do everything possible to remain on that path, a path toward a closer relationship with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

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<b>Ahavas Israel</b> Passaic, NJ	<b>Bet Knesset Emek Refaim</b> Jerusalem, Israel	<b>Calabassas Shul</b> Calabassas, CA	<b>Cong. Beth Hamedrosh</b> Wynnewood, PA	<b>Cong. Ohab Zedek</b> New York, NY	<b>Cong. Torat Emet</b> Phoenix, AZ
<b>Ahavas Torah: The Scottsdale Torah Center</b> Scottsdale, AZ	<b>Bet Knesset Hanassi</b> Jerusalem, Israel	<b>Center for Jewish Life</b> Princeton, NJ	<b>Cong. Beth Israel</b> Berkeley, CA	<b>Cong. Netivot Shalom</b> Baltimore, MD	<b>Cong. Zichron Yisroel</b> Thornhill, ON
<b>Ahavas Yisrael of Edison</b> Edison, NJ	<b>Bet Midrash Torani Leumi</b> Bet Shemesh, Israel	<b>Chabad of Richmond</b> Richmond, VA	<b>Cong. Beth Israel</b> Metairie, LA	<b>Cong. Ohav Emeth</b> Highland Park, NJ	<b>Darchei Noam Cong.</b> St Louis Park, MN
<b>Ahavas Yisroel</b> Flushing, NY	<b>Beth Abraham Yoseph Of Toronto Cong.</b> Thornhill, ON	<b>Chabad Of Richmond</b> Richmond, BC	<b>Cong. Beth Sholom</b> Lawrence, NY	<b>Cong. Ohav Sholom</b> Merrick, NY	<b>Darchei Noam of Glenbrook</b> Northbrook, IL
<b>Ahavat Achim Orthodox Cong. of Fair Lawn</b> Fair Lawn, NJ	<b>Beth David Synagogue</b> West Hartford, CT	<b>Clanton Park Synagogue</b> Toronto, ON	<b>Cong. Beth Sholom</b> Providence, RI	<b>Cong. Ohr Hatorah</b> Phoenix, AZ	<b>Darchei Zion</b> Modiin, Israel
<b>Anshe Sholom B'nai Israel</b> Chicago, IL	<b>Beth David Synagogue</b> Binghamton, NY	<b>Community Synagogue of Monsey</b> Monsey, NY	<b>Cong. Beth Sholom</b> Providence, RI	<b>Cong. Ohr Saadya</b> Teaneck, NJ	<b>DAT Minyan</b> Denver, CO
<b>Anshei Chesed Cong.</b> Boynton Beach, FL	<b>Beth David Synagogue</b> Binghamton, NY	<b>Cong. AABJ&amp;D</b> West Orange, NJ	<b>Cong. B'IAV</b> Overland Park, KS	<b>Cong. Ohr Torah</b> West Orange, NJ	<b>Daughters of Israel</b> West Orange, NJ
<b>Avenue N Sephardic Cong.</b> Brooklyn, NY	<b>Beth Hamidrash Cong.</b> Vancouver, BC	<b>Cong. Adas Israel</b> Passaic, NJ	<b>Cong. Bnai Brith Jacob</b> Savannah, GA	<b>Cong. Or Torah</b> Skokie, IL	<b>DRS High School for Boys</b> Woodmere, NY
<b>Ayin L'Tzion</b> Thornhill, ON	<b>Beth Israel Synagogue</b> Omaha, NE	<b>Cong. Adat Yeshurun</b> La Jolla, CA	<b>Cong. Bnai Israel</b> Brooklyn, NY	<b>Cong. Rinat Yisrael</b> Teaneck, NJ	<b>EDOS</b> Denver, CO
<b>BACH Jewish Center</b> Long Beach, NY	<b>Beth Israel Synagogue</b> Edmonton, AB	<b>Cong. Adas Yeshurun</b> Chicago, IL	<b>Cong. Bnai Israel-Ohev Zedek</b> Philadelphia, PA	<b>Cong. Rodfei Sholom</b> San Antonio, TX	<b>Eitz Chayim of Dogwood Park</b> West Hempstead, NY
<b>Bais Abraham</b> St Louis, MO	<b>Beth Jacob Cong. Of Kitchener-Waterloo</b> Kitchener, ON	<b>Cong. Adath Israel</b> Elizabeth, NJ	<b>Cong. B'nai Torah</b> Springfield, MA	<b>Cong. Schomre Israel</b> Poughkeepsie, NY	<b>Elmora Hills Minyan</b> Union, NJ
<b>Bais Hamedrash Oneg Shabbos</b> Montréal, QC	<b>Beth Jacob Cong.</b> Atlanta, GA	<b>Cong. Adereth El</b> New York, NY	<b>Cong. Brothers of Israel</b> Long Branch, NJ	<b>Cong. Shaar Hashomayim</b> Westmount, QC	<b>Eretz Chemda</b> Katamon, Israel
<b>Baron Hirsch Synagogue</b> Memphis, TN	<b>Beth Jacob Cong.</b> Irvine, CA	<b>Cong. Agudath Achim</b> Bradley Beach, NJ	<b>Cong. Darchei Noam</b> Fair Lawn, NJ	<b>Cong. Shaaray Tefila</b> Lawrence, NY	<b>Etz Chaim</b> Beit Shemesh, Israel
<b>Bais Chaim Dovid</b> Lincolnwood, IL	<b>Beth Jacob Cong.</b> Oakland, CA	<b>Cong. Ahavas Achim</b> Highland Park, NJ	<b>Cong. Dor Tikvah</b> Charleston, SC	<b>Cong. Shaare Tefilla</b> Dallas, TX	<b>Ezra Bessaroth</b> Seattle, WA
<b>Beis Medrash of Harborview</b> Lawrence, NY	<b>Beth Jacob Cong.</b> Beverly Hills, CA	<b>Cong. Ahavat Achim</b> Portland, OR	<b>Cong. Eitz Chaim</b> Flushing, NY	<b>Cong. Shaare Tzedek</b> Englewood, NJ	<b>Fifth Avenue Synagogue</b> New York, NY
<b>Beis Midrash of Bergenfield</b> Bergenfield, NJ	<b>Beth Joseph Cong.</b> Phoenix, AZ	<b>Cong. Ahavat Shalom</b> Teaneck, NJ	<b>Cong. Emek Beracha</b> Palo Alto, CA	<b>Cong. Shaarei Tefillah</b> Newton Centre, MA	<b>Fleetwood Synagogue</b> Mount Vernon, NY
<b>Beis Midrash of Woodmere</b> Woodmere, NY	<b>Beth Ora</b> St. Laurent, QC	<b>Cong. Ahavath Torah</b> Englewood, NJ	<b>Cong. Ezras Israel</b> Chicago, IL	<b>Cong. Sha'arei Tzedek</b> Chicago, IL	<b>Forest Hill Jewish Centre</b> Toronto, ON
<b>Beis Yosef D'ulem</b> Flushing, NY	<b>Beth Shalom</b> Rochester, NY	<b>Cong. Aitz Chaim</b> West Palm Beach, FL	<b>Cong. Israel of Springfield</b> Springfield, NJ	<b>Cong. Sha'arei Torah</b> Cincinnati, OH	<b>Golf Manor Synagogue</b> Cincinnati, OH
<b>Beit Chaverim Synagogue</b> Westport, CT	<b>Beth Shalom Congregation</b> Scranton, PA	<b>Cong. Anshe Sfard</b> Kehillat Torah Glendale, WI	<b>Cong. Kadimah-Toras Moshe</b> Brighton, MA	<b>Cong. Sherith Israel</b> Nashville, TN	<b>Great Neck Synagogue</b> Great Neck, NY
<b>Beit David Highland Lakes Synagogue</b> Aventura, FL	<b>Beth Tikva</b> Dollard Des Ormeaux, QC	<b>Cong. Anshei Chesed</b> Woodmere, NY	<b>Cong. KBY</b> Suffern, NY	<b>Cong. Shevet Achim</b> Mercer Island, WA	<b>Green Road Synagogue</b> Beachwood, OH
<b>Beit Knesset Emek Refaim</b> Jerusalem, Israel	<b>Beth Zion Cong.</b> Cote-St-Luc, QC	<b>Cong. Bais Efraim</b> Yitzchok Woodmere, NY	<b>Cong. Kehillath Jacob</b> Beth Samuel Peterson Park, IL	<b>Cong. Shomrei Emunah</b> Baltimore, MD	<b>HAFTAR</b> Lawrence, NY
<b>Beit Kneset Mercazi</b> Yad Binyamin, Israel	<b>Bikur Cholim Machzikay Hadath</b> Seattle, WA	<b>Cong. Bais Torah</b> Suffern, NY	<b>Cong. Kehilath Jeshurun</b> New York, NY	<b>Cong. Shomrei Shabbos</b> Far Rockaway, NY	<b>Hebrew Institute of Riverdale - The Bayit</b> Bronx, NY
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<b>Heichal Shiloh</b> <i>Rosh Ha'Ayin, Israel</i>	<b>Koschitzky Minyan</b> <i>North York, ON</i>	<b>Or Chaim</b> <i>Toronto, ON</i>	<b>Suburban Orthodox Synagogue Toras Chaim</b> <i>Bronx, NY</i>	<b>Young Israel Of Baychester</b> <i>Bronx, NY</i>	<b>Young Israel of Oak Park</b> <i>Oak Park, MI</i>
<b>Heichal Shlomo</b> <i>Jerusalem , Israel</i>	<b>KSY</b> <i>Beit Shemesh, Israel</i>	<b>Orot Hacarmel</b> <i>San Diego, CA</i>	<b>Synagogue of the Suburban Torah Center</b> <i>Livingston, NJ</i>	<b>Young Israel of Brookline</b> <i>Brookline, MA</i>	<b>Young Israel of Oceanside</b> <i>Oceanside, NY</i>
<b>Herzlia - Adas Yeshurun</b> <i>Winnipeg, MB</i>	<b>Lechu Neranana</b> <i>Ra'anana, Israel</i>	<b>Orthodox Union</b> <i>New York, NY</i>	<b>The Beachwood Kehillah</b> <i>Beachwood, OH</i>	<b>Young Israel of Canarsie</b> <i>Brooklyn, NY</i>	<b>Young Israel Of Orange County</b> <i>Irvine, CA</i>
<b>Hildesheimer Shul</b> <i>Jerusalem , Israel</i>	<b>Lido Beach Synagogue</b> <i>Lido Beach, NY</i>	<b>Petah Tikva</b> <i>Toronto, ON</i>	<b>The Bialystoker Synagogue</b> <i>New York, NY</i>	<b>Young Israel of Century City</b> <i>Los Angeles, CA</i>	<b>Young Israel Of Ottawa</b> <i>Ottawa, ON</i>
<b>Hillel at Brandeis</b> <i>Waltham, MA</i>	<b>Lincoln Square Synagogue</b> <i>New York, NY</i>	<b>Queens Jewish Center</b> <i>Forest Hills, NY</i>	<b>The Frisch School</b> <i>Paramus, NJ</i>	<b>Young Israel Of Chomedy</b> <i>Chomedy, QC</i>	<b>Young Israel Of Passaic-Clifton</b> <i>Passaic, NJ</i>
<b>Hoshen Modiin</b> <i>Modiin , Israel</i>	<b>Lower Merion Synagogue</b> <i>Bala Cynwyd, PA</i>	<b>Rambam Mesivta</b> <i>Lawrence, NY</i>	<b>The Jewish Center</b> <i>New York, NY</i>	<b>Young Israel of Deerfield Beach</b> <i>Deerfield Beach, FL</i>	<b>Young Israel of Plainview</b> <i>Plainview, NY</i>
<b>The Jewish Educational Center</b> <i>Elizabeth, NJ</i>	<b>Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls</b> <i>Teaneck, NJ</i>	<b>Rambam Shul</b> <i>Be'er Sheva, Israel</i>	<b>The Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach</b> <i>Atlantic Beach, NY</i>	<b>Young Israel of Fair Lawn</b> <i>Fair Lawn, NJ</i>	<b>Young Israel of Potomac</b> <i>Potomac, MD</i>
<b>JLIC - The Johns Hopkins University</b> <i>Baltimore, MD</i>	<b>Magen David Sephardic</b> <i>Wykagyl, NY</i>	<b>Riverdale Jewish Center</b> <i>Riverdale, NY</i>	<b>The Jewish Learning Initiative On Campus</b> <i>Toronto, ON</i>	<b>Young Israel of Flatbush</b> <i>Brooklyn, NY</i>	<b>Young Israel of Queens Valley</b> <i>Flushing, NY</i>
<b>JLIC at Queens College Hillel</b> <i>Queens, NY</i>	<b>Margolin Hebrew Academy</b> <i>Memphis, TN</i>	<b>SAR High School</b> <i>Riverdale, NY</i>	<b>The Kipa</b> <i>Be'er Sheva, Israel</i>	<b>Young Israel of Forest Hills</b> <i>Forest Hills, NY</i>	<b>Young Israel of Riverdale</b> <i>Bronx, NY</i>
<b>Joint Distibution Committee</b> <i>Jerusalem, Israel</i>	<b>Marlee Shul</b> <i>Toronto, ON</i>	<b>SCY High</b> <i>San Diego, CA</i>	<b>The Roslyn Synagogue</b> <i>Roslyn Heights, NY</i>	<b>Young Israel of Fort Lee</b> <i>Fort Lee, NJ</i>	<b>Young Israel of Scarsdale</b> <i>Scarsdale, NY</i>
<b>Kehilat Zichron Yosef</b> <i>Jerusalem, Israel</i>	<b>Meitar Merkazi</b> <i>Be'er Sheva, Israel</i>	<b>Sephardic Bikur Holim</b> <i>Seattle, WA</i>	<b>The Village Shul</b> <i>Toronto, ON</i>	<b>Young Israel of Greater Cleveland</b> <i>Beachwood, OH</i>	<b>Young Israel of Sharon</b> <i>Sharon , MA</i>
<b>Keneset Israel Torah Center</b> <i>Sacramento, CA</i>	<b>Menorat Hamaor</b> <i>Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel</i>	<b>Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach</b> <i>Long Beach, NY</i>	<b>Thornhill Community Shul</b> <i>Thornhill, ON</i>	<b>Young Israel of Hewlett</b> <i>Hewlett, NY</i>	<b>Young Israel of Skokie</b> <i>Skokie, IL</i>
<b>Kehillas Bais Yehudah Tzvi</b> <i>Cedarhurst, NY</i>	<b>Merkaz Modiin</b> <i>Modiin , Israel</i>	<b>Sephardic Institute Synagogue</b> <i>Brooklyn, NY</i>	<b>Tiferet Israel</b> <i>Toronto, ON</i>	<b>Young Israel of Hillcrest</b> <i>Flushing, NY</i>	<b>Young Israel of Southfield</b> <i>Southfield, MI</i>
<b>Kehillas Meor HaTorah</b> <i>Baltimore, MD</i>	<b>Mevaser Zion</b> <i>Tel Mond, Israel</i>	<b>Sephardic Kehila Centre Synagogue</b> <i>Thornhill, ON</i>	<b>Torat Emet</b> <i>Columbus, OH</i>	<b>Young Israel of Holliswood</b> <i>Jamaica, NY</i>	<b>Young Israel of St. Louis</b> <i>St Louis, MO</i>
<b>Kehillat Ahavat Tzion</b> <i>Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel</i>	<b>Mishkan Shilo</b> <i>Beit Shemesh , Israel</i>	<b>Sha'arei Israel</b> <i>Raleigh, NC</i>	<b>Touro Synagogue</b> <i>Newport , RI</i>	<b>Young Israel of Hollywood</b> <i>Fort Lauderdale, FL</i>	<b>Young Israel of Staten Island</b> <i>Staten Island, NY</i>
<b>Kehilat Chovevei Tzion</b> <i>Skokie, IL</i>	<b>Mizrachi Bayit</b> <i>Toronto, ON</i>	<b>Shaare Zedek Cong.</b> <i>Winnipeg, MB</i>	<b>Ulpanat Orot</b> <i>Downsview, ON</i>	<b>Young Israel of Houston</b> <i>Houston, TX</i>	<b>Young Israel of Toco Hills</b> <i>Atlanta, GA</i>
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<b>Kehillat Ohel Ephraim</b> <i>Ariel, Israel</i>	<b>Moledet</b> <i>Be'er Sheva, Israel</i>	<b>Shaarei Tefilla</b> <i>Las Vegas, NV</i>	<b>University of Massachusetts JLIC Hillel</b> <i>Amherst, MA</i>	<b>Young Israel of Jamaica</b> <i>Las Vegas, NV</i>	<b>Young Israel of West Hempstead</b> <i>West Hempstead, NY</i>
<b>Kehillat Shaareei Torah Of Toronto</b> <i>Toronto, ON</i>	<b>Moriah Shul</b> <i>Ra'anana, Israel</i>	<b>Shaarei Tefillah Cong.</b> <i>Toronto, ON</i>	<b>University of Pennsylvania Hillel</b> <i>Philadelphia, PA</i>	<b>Young Israel of Las Vegas</b> <i>Las Vegas, NV</i>	<b>Young Israel of West Rogers Park</b> <i>Chicago, IL</i>
<b>Kehillat Shaarei Yonah Menachem</b> <i>Modiin , Israel</i>	<b>Shaarei Torah Orthodox Cong. of Syracuse</b> <i>Dewitt, NY</i>	<b>Shaarey Yerushalayim</b> <i>Valley Village, CA</i>	<b>Viewmount</b> <i>Toronto, ON</i>	<b>Young Israel of Lawrence-Cedarhurst</b> <i>Cedarhurst, NY</i>	<b>Young Israel Ohab Zedek of North Riverdale</b> <i>Yonkers, NY</i>
<b>Kemp Mill Synagogue</b> <i>Silver Spring, MD</i>	<b>Shaarey Zedek</b> <i>Valley Village, CA</i>	<b>Shalhevet High School</b> <i>Los Angeles, CA</i>	<b>West Coast Torah Center</b> <i>Los Angeles, CA</i>	<b>Young Israel of Long Beach</b> <i>Long Beach, NY</i>	<b>Young Israel Shomrei Emunah</b> <i>Silver Spring, MD</i>
<b>Keneseth Israel Cong.</b> <i>St Louis Park, MN</i>	<b>Shalhevet High School</b> <i>Los Angeles, CA</i>	<b>Shirat David</b> <i>Efrat, Israel</i>	<b>Westville Synagogue</b> <i>New Haven, CT</i>	<b>Young Israel of Memphis</b> <i>Memphis, TN</i>	<b>YU High School for Boys</b> <i>New York, NY</i>
<b>Kesher Israel Cong.</b> <i>Harrisburg, PA</i>	<b>Shivtei Yisrael</b> <i>Ra'anana, Israel</i>	<b>Shomrai Shabbos</b> <i>Toronto, ON</i>	<b>Woodside Synagogue Ahavas Torah</b> <i>Silver Spring, MD</i>	<b>Young Israel Of Montreal</b> <i>Montréal, QC</i>	<b>YU High School for Girls</b> <i>Hollis, NY</i>
<b>Kesher Israel</b> <i>Washington, DC</i>	<b>Shomrai Shabbos</b> <i>Toronto, ON</i>	<b>SKA High School for Girls</b> <i>Hewlett Bay Park, NY</i>	<b>Yagdil Torah</b> <i>Boca Raton, FL</i>	<b>Young Israel of Neve Aliza</b> <i>Karnei Shomron, Israel</i>	<b>YULA Boys High School</b> <i>Los Angeles, CA</i>
<b>Kew Gardens Synagogue</b> <i>Kew Gardens, NY</i>	<b>South Fallsburg Hebrew Association</b> <i>South Fallsburg, NY</i>	<b>Spanish &amp; Portuguese Synagogue Of Montreal</b> <i>Montréal, QC</i>	<b>Yavneh Academy</b> <i>Paramus, NJ</i>	<b>Young Israel of New Hyde Park</b> <i>New Hyde Park, NY</i>	
<b>Kingsway Jewish Center</b> <i>Brooklyn, NY</i>	<b>Spanish &amp; Portuguese Synagogue Of Montreal</b> <i>Montréal, QC</i>		<b>JLIC at Yale University</b> <i>New Haven, CT</i>	<b>Young Israel of New Rochelle</b> <i>New Rochelle, NY</i>	
<b>Kneset Beth Israel</b> <i>Richmond, VA</i>			<b>Yeshiva of Flatbush</b> <i>Brooklyn, NY</i>	<b>Young Israel of North Woodmere</b> <i>North Woodmere, NY</i>	
<b>Kneseth Israel Cong.</b> <i>Birmingham, AL</i>			<b>YU Torah Mitzion Kollel of Chicago</b> <i>Miami, FL</i>	<b>Young Israel of Northridge</b> <i>Northridge, CA</i>	
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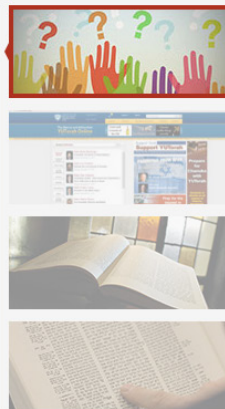
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