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 בר"ה אחד של רשעים גמורין ואחד של צדיקים גמורין ואחד של בינוניים צדיקים גמורין 写 nakar ונתפשים לאלתר לחיים רעשים 写 nakar ונתפשים לאלתר למיתה בינוניים 写 nakar יתומין וחלמים מר"ה עד יוה"כ זכו 写 nakar לחיים לא זכו 写 nakar לموت.

R. Kruispediai 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 רעע נחתם למיתה, והבינוני יתולין ויחדום מר"ה עד יום הכפורים אם עשה תשובה נחתם לחיים אם לא נחתם למיתה.

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 mitzvos? 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 mitzvos?

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 mitzvos 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...
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and continued conversations among leaders, the conference continues through ongoing conversations and provides a platform for change in issues affecting our communities.

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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