

## The Journey Back

In the first Morasha class of this two-part series, we examined the basic meaning of *teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* means to return – a return to God, and a return to a person's own inner purity. In this class, we will study the route that the journey back takes. The Sages revealed a system by which full repentance can be achieved. In this class we will describe and explore this process.

Each person has a unique combination of strengths and weaknesses, or, as the Sages put it: “every person is a small world” (Avot d’Rabbi Natan 23:3). To improve and change himself, a person will need to fine-tune and tailor the teshuvah process to take advantage of his strengths and to overcome his weaknesses.

Thus, together with fulfilling the classic components of teshuvah to correct a wrongdoing (regret, cessation, confession, resolution, and if necessary, asking forgiveness from someone), a person also needs to have a broader approach to character change, addressing the roots of his wrongdoing. The class will conclude with some practical tools and exercises.

This class will address the following questions:

- What is the process of teshuvah?
- Can I really resolve never to repeat a mistake?
- What if you attempt to become reconciled with someone and he refuses your request?
- Why is teshuvah on one's character traits sometimes more important than improving one's actions?
- When should a person do teshuvah?

**Class Outline:**

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## SECTION I. THE PROCESS OF TESHUVAH

We all make mistakes. Almost every day we do things that we really don't want to be doing. It's a fascinating phenomenon. When was the last time you had the following experience? You were confronted with the opportunity to do something that you perceived as being wrong, something you clearly did not want to do; but a funny thing happened ... The very act you didn't want to do, you did anyway. Sometimes, we may even do harmful things, intentionally – spread a rumor, lie, steal, be unfaithful, not help someone in need. And then at some later time, we realized that these behaviors not only hurt others, and ruined our relationships, they undermined our good essential selves. You decide, enough is enough; it's time to make amends for the past and work to prevent repeating negative behavior in the future. Where do I begin? (See Shimon Apisdorf, *Rosh HaShanah - Yom Kippur Survival Guide*, Leviathan Press, p. 101.)

Practically, teshuvah involves a number of components which involve introspection and hard work, and ultimately leads to greatness.

### 1. **Rambam (Maimonides), Hilchot Teshuvah (Laws of Repentance), 2:2, 9 – The components of teshuvah: regret, cessation, confession, resolution, and if necessary, asking forgiveness from others.**

How does one do teshuvah?

- The transgressor stops doing the transgression and removes it from his thoughts.
- He resolves that he will not do it again in the future ...
- He regrets [that which he did] in the past ...
- He verbally expresses his wrongdoings to God and makes a verbal resolution for the future.
- Regarding wrongdoings against one's fellow man: one must reimburse whatever he owes him, and ask the other person's forgiveness.

ומה היא התשובה?

- הוא שיעזוב החוטא חטאו ויסירנו ממחשבתו,
- ויגמור בלבו שלא יעשהו עוד ...
- וכן יתנחם על שעבר ...
- וצריך להתודות בשפתיו ולומר עניינות אלו שגמר בלבו.
- אבל עבירות שבין אדם לחבירו ... אינו נמחל לו לעולם עד שיתן לחבירו מה שהוא חייב לו וירצהו ... ולשאל ממנו שימחול לו.

The steps to teshuvah can be divided into past, present, and future (based on Rabbi Mordechai Becher, *Gateway to Judaism*, p. 136):

	Action:	Related to the ...
Step 1	<b>Regret</b> ( <i>charatah</i> ). Realize the extent of the damage and feel sincere regret.	Past
Step 2	<b>Cessation</b> ( <i>azivat ha'chet</i> ). Immediately stop the harmful action.	

	Action:	Related to the ...
Step 3	<b>Confession</b> ( <i>viduy</i> ). Articulate the mistake privately to God and ask for forgiveness.	Present
Step 4	<b>Resolution</b> ( <i>kabalah l'ha'bah</i> ). Make a firm commitment not to repeat it in the future.	Future

If the wrongdoing involves another person, a fifth component is then necessary – asking forgiveness (*méchilah*). We will now discuss each component in detail. The specific order of the four steps below is outlined in the Sefer Charedim (Chapter 63). In practice, the order may be varied.

### PART A. STEP 1: REGRET (*CHARATAH* - חרטה)

The first step is to recognize that one has done something wrong and to feel regret over having done it.

Many people are confused between regret and guilt. This is the difference:

Regret is constructive	Guilt can be paralyzing
Regret is realizing that you've missed an opportunity, but that your essence remains pure.	Guilt is feeling like you're a bad and worthless person.

The following example illustrates the difference:

*During your first year as a Wall Street investor you get a private meeting with George Soros, the multi-billionaire investor! For an hour he gives you all the tips about how to invest and make money on the stock market. As you try not to gawk at the expensive furniture or get distracted by the view from the 40th floor, he tells you which companies to invest in and which to avoid.*

*Then the meeting ends. The days go by. You invest a little here and there, going on your own rather than following his tips. A year later, after all his investment predictions came true, he invites you back to follow up. Which do you say to him?*

1. “Mr. Soros, I feel so guilty I didn't listen to you. I'm such a bad person for not following your investment advice!”
2. “I really regret the past year. I missed out on a big financial opportunity. Listening to the experts really does pay!” (From a lecture by Rabbi Asher Resnick, Jerusalem)

Similarly, when we stand before God and look back at our past, we should regret the mistakes and the missed opportunities, rather than feel guilty.

1. **Selichot liturgy – Regret is the feeling of, “It just wasn't worth it. I can't believe I missed the opportunity!”**

We turned away from Your mitzvot and instructions, which are for our good, but it wasn't worth it.

סרנו ממצותיך וממשפטיך הטובים ולא שוה לנו.

2. **Rabbi E. E. Dessler, Michtav M'Elياهو, Vol. II, pp. 79-80 – The more one feels the sting of regret, the more likely one is to change for the better. In fact, when we learn from our mistakes, God no longer reckons them as mistakes, but rather as mitzvot!**

The purpose of regret is to strengthen one's commitment for the future. This is because a commitment to improve is built on recognizing the negativity of transgression and feeling the sting of past mistakes ...

When a person feels true regret he comes to realize that the transgression just wasn't worth it ... It is the transgression itself that caused him this awareness, and therefore he returns to God out of love [rather than fear of the consequences]. This is the meaning of the statement, "Great is teshuvah for it converts transgressions into merits" [Yoma 86b]. The transgressor was raised to a level of great love for God due to the transgressions, and therefore God judges them as mitzvot!

חרטה באה כדי לחזק את הקבלה להבא, כי אין הקבלה מבוססת היטב אלא כשהיא באה מתוך הכרת גודל החטא ומתוך צער על העבירות שעבר...

כששב ומתחרט מכיר את שפלות החטא ... אכן הרי העבירה גרמה לו הכרות אלה, ולכן השב מאהבה ... עבירותיו נעשין כזכויות [יומא פו:] כי כיון שנתעלה לאהבה גדולה זו בגרם החטא, דן הקב"ה עליהם ברוב חסדיו בבחינת זכויות.

As the next source describes, there are a number of obstacles in the path toward true regret.

3. **Rabbi Shraga Simmons, Teshuvah: Dry Cleaning for the Soul (aish.com) – clarify what's right and wrong so that you don't justify your actions and thereby avoid having regret.**

Sometimes, we try to justify our actions, using a variety of excuses:

- "Everyone else is doing it"
- "At least I'm not like some people who go around killing and stealing!"
- "Who are *you* to say it's wrong?!"

Regret is not really possible unless we can clearly distinguish between right and wrong. Otherwise, we will just rationalize and delude ourselves into thinking we've done nothing wrong. The ever-changing, sliding standards of society contribute to this lack of clarity.

For example, imagine growing up in a house where gossip was constantly spoken. Unless you're introduced to the Jewish idea of *lashon hara* ("negative speech") and made aware of its destructive nature, you may otherwise never consider gossip to be wrong!

For this reason, it is important to be familiar with *halachah*, Jewish law, and to have a rabbi who knows you personally and can advise you ...

## **PART B. STEP 2: CESSATION (AZIVAT HA'CHET - עזיבת החטא)**

Words can come easily. But actually stopping the harmful action shows a true commitment to change. The following is a humorous example.

*You're out late at a party with friends. What a party! Fun, fun, fun, and then there's a downer. While driving home you hear the dreaded sound – police sirens in full blue and red technicolor. What could be wrong? You're under the speed limit. You're not drunk. But your friend drops his stash of marijuana on the floor of your car.*

*Uh oh. After the car search and the polite request to “identify this substance, sir,” you’re charged for possession of marijuana. No-ooooo!!*

*The court date is set. You know this is serious business. Your lawyer tells you how to admit to the facts and take responsibility to clean up your act. Then he adds, “And remember: you’re on trial for possession of marijuana, so don’t show up to court stoned!” (Heard from Rabbi Noach Weinberg, Aish HaTorah, Jerusalem.)*

The message of this parable is: if you’re trying to improve, make sure you stop the negative action. The importance of this step, cessation, is illustrated by the next source.

**1. Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Ta’anit 16a – Purification will only work if you drop the source of impurity. Throw away the *sheretz* before you get in the mikvah.**

Rav Addah bar Ahavah said, “Consider a person who is transgressing, and admits to it, yet does not stop. He is like a person who is holding a *sheretz* [impure animal]. Even if he tries to purify himself with all the water in the world, it won’t help. But as soon as he throws away the *sheretz*, and submerges in a mikvah [purification bath], he becomes pure!

אמר רב אדא בר אהבה: אדם שיש בידו עבירה,  
ומתודה ואינו חוזר בה למה הוא דומה - לאדם שתופס  
שרץ בידו, שאפילו טובל בכל מימות שבעולם - לא  
עלתה לו טבילה. זרקו מידו, כיון שטבל בארבעים סאה  
- מיד עלתה לו טבילה.

Can you imagine trying to ask forgiveness from someone while you continue to wrong him at the same time? Without stopping the negative action, all the intention in the whole world won’t help.

Part of stopping incorrect actions is making boundaries to prevent repeating them. This is a crucial element of repentance, for it implies that one has learned from his previous mistakes. Not only does a person cease to sin – he even tries to ensure that he won’t slip up again.

**2. Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pakuda, Chovot HaLevavot (Duties of the Heart) 7:5, The Gate of Teshuvah – Be careful to keep away from things which may cause you to repeat old mistakes.**

[Part of stopping the transgression is:] avoid those things which lead to transgression. This includes avoiding things that are questionable ... As the Sages told us, “Make a boundary for the Torah” [Pirkei Avot/Ethics of the Fathers 1:1].

והשני, עזיבת המותר המביא לידי אסור, כדברים  
המסופקים אם מותרים הם או אסורים ... שצוו עליהם  
רבותינו ז”ל ואמרו: ועשו סיג לתורה.

The following are examples of making a boundary to help one stop the negative action:

*If you don’t want to break your diet, don’t bring chocolate into the house.*

*If you have an issue with drinking, hang out with friends who drink less, or not at all.*

*If you have a bad habit with the Internet, order a filtered Internet service.*

**PART C. STEP 3: CONFESSION (VIDUY - וידוי) – TAKING RESPONSIBILITY**

The third step is to tell God about it. Confession means verbally admitting your wrongdoing to God alone, as the following source illustrates.

1. **Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah 1:1 – It is a mitzvah to verbally admit to God that you made a mistake or rebelled against Him.**

If a person transgresses any of the mitzvot in the Torah – whether an obligation or prohibition, whether it was intentional or unintentional – he should admit his transgression before God when he does teshuvah and stops the transgression. As it says, “If a man or woman sins against his fellow man, thus being untrue to God and becoming guilty of a crime, he must confess the sin that he has committed” [Bamidbar/Numbers 5:6-7]. This is the mitzvah to verbally confess to God.

How does one confess? Say to God [in any language]: “Please, Almighty, I have transgressed accidentally, or with intent, or by actively rebelling against you. I did the following ... Now, I feel regret and embarrassment about what I did, and therefore I will never do it again [see Step 4 below].” This is the basic confession, but it is praiseworthy to say more.

כל המצוות שבתורה, בין עשה בין לא תעשה, אם עבר אדם על אחת מהן בין בזדון בין בשגגה, כשיעשה תשובה וישוב מחטאו חייב להתודות לפני הקל ברוך הוא, שנאמר איש או אשה כי יעשו מכל חטאת האדם למעל מעל בה' ואשמה הנפש ההוא והתנדו את חטאתם אשר עשו, זה וידוי דברים, וידוי זה מצות עשה.

כיצד מתודה אומר "אנא השם, חטאתי, עויתי, פשעתי לפניך ועשיתי כך וכך והרי ניהמתי ובושתי במעשי ולעולם איני חוזר לדבר זה", והו עיקרו של וידוי. וכל המרבה להתודות ומאריך בענין זה הרי זה משובח.

The purpose of confession is for a person to tell himself, “That’s not who I want to be.” Why must our feelings be expressed verbally? Furthermore, if God knows all our thoughts and feelings, why do we need to tell Him? The next source will explain.

2. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu Vol. V, p. 260 – Expressing feelings with words makes them much more real and lasting. For this reason we express our regret to God in a verbal confession.**

From the fact that verbal confession is one of the main ingredients in the mitzvah of teshuvah [as we see in the Rambam, previous source], we learn the following:

It is not enough to have emotional or intellectual insights and awakenings. We go a step further and express it with words. Because when you add words to [transitory] thoughts and feelings, they become fixed in a person’s heart. By means of speech, the spiritual level [attained by teshuvah] is completed and secured. Therefore, the prophet reminds us, “Take *words* with you and return to God [and say to Him, ‘May You forgive all wrongdoing and accept good intentions, and let our lips substitute for offerings’” Hoshea/Hosea 14:3].

הרי שוידוי דברים הוא מעיקרי מצות התשובה. הלימוד מזה:

אינו די בגילויים שבמחשבה ושבהרגש, אלא צריך לגלותם גם בפה כי בהוספת הדיבור אל המחשבה וההרגש נקבע בלב האדם. נמצא שהדיבור הוא הגומר והקובע את המדריגה וע"כ "קחו עמכם דברים ושובו אל ה'".

The verbal confession is more for our sake than for God’s. It helps to strengthen our resolve by making our thoughts and feelings more concrete, closer to the realm of action.

As the next account shows, wholeheartedly admitting responsibility (true confession) is not as easy as it sounds. In fact, it is excruciatingly difficult (see *Orchot Chaim*, Ch. 36). We make excuses. We excel at rationalizing. But the person who wrenches from himself the unpleasant truth, “I have messed up,” has performed a great and meaningful act.

*Circuit Court Judge Alice Gilbert had an innovative idea. She required every person convicted in her courtroom – for crimes ranging from manslaughter to passing bad checks – to write an essay answering the following questions: “How did my crime affect me? My family? My community? What can be done to prevent such crimes in the future?”*

*On a recent visit to Michigan, I stayed with Judge Gilbert (who happens to be my cousin). I was intrigued by her brilliant idea. Always interested in the process of changing human behavior, I asked to read some of the essays.*

*I picked out the most severe crimes: a drunken driver who had killed a teenage boy; a guy who had robbed a gas station and killed a hapless customer. With great anticipation, I sat down to read these dramatic confrontations of human beings with their shadow selves, the flood of regret surely unleashed by such honest soul-searching.*

*No go! What I read instead was essay after essay explaining why the writer was not really guilty of the crime. Totally ignoring the four questions, each convict wrote at length of how events had conspired to produce the horrific outcome and that it was absolutely, positively not the fault of the writer! (Sara Yocheved Rigler, *The Crime I Didn't Commit*, aish.com)*

We have to take responsibility for our actions and admit to them. To illustrate this point, one of the requests in the daily *Shemoneh Esrei* is for teshuvah. The request is *not* phrased as, “Blessed are You, God, Who returns us to You.” Rather it reads, “... Who wants us to return to You.” God can only want us to return, so to speak, but we have to take the responsibility and take the first step ourselves.

#### **PART D. STEP 4: RESOLUTION FOR THE FUTURE (KABALAH L'HA'BAH – קבלה להבא)**

The fourth step is resolving not to repeat the transgression in the future. Although it may seem daunting to commit to never repeating a bad habit, the following source describes how it can be done piece by piece.

##### **1. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, *Sifsei Chaim*, Vol. I, p. 269 – Make a firm resolution to fix at least part of a transgression. This contributes to the goal of fixing the entire transgression.**

Every transgression has a number of parts and aspects to it. Furthermore, there are certain times and situations where it is easier to avoid the transgression, and other times when it is a tremendous moral struggle (*nisayon*). For example, misusing the opportunity to study Torah (*bitul Torah*): in some situations a person can easily overcome his *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) to waste time, and other times it is a great struggle ...

Therefore, a person should identify the easiest parts of a transgression in order to address and correct them first. This is not only because he will find it easier to correct them, but also because his resolution for the future will be firmer.

כל עבירה מתחלקת לבחינות שונות, בכל עבירה יש זמנים ומצבים שקל הוא לאדם ומסוגל יותר להיזהר מלהכשל בעבירה, ויש אשר הנסיונות לעמוד כנגד אותה העבירה קשים מאוד. ולדוגמא: ביטול תורה, יש מצבים שאדם יכול יותר בנקל להתגבר על היצר הרע דביטול תורה, ויש אשר הנסיונות בו קשים מאוד ...

ראשית, האדם צריך לקחת את פרטי העבירה הקלים ביותר ולתקנם, וזאת כיון שהם יותר קלים, א"כ נקל יותר לתקנם, נוסף לכך גם הקבלה להבא תהיה יותר יציבה.



Therefore, one can achieve complete teshuvah regarding even the components of a transgression ... Nevertheless, a person must continue to desire to rise to higher spiritual levels by correcting all the components of this transgression, and every other transgression.

האפשרות להיות בעל תשובה גמור קיימת גם בחלקי העבירה. ... מ"מ ודאי שהאדם מצדו צריכה להיות אצלו השאיפה להמשיך לעלות ולהתעלות בתיקון כל פרטי העבירה זו ושאר העבירות.

When a person is inspired to improve, his burning desire for perfection may lead him to take spiritual leaps and bounds. This method can be dangerous. As we saw in the previous source, steady self-development, one step at a time, is usually the recommended strategy. An example of the latter is the following:

*A person has a problem speaking negatively about others. He knows there's a certain friend with whom he speaks lashon hara over the first cup of coffee of the morning. Although he cannot change his speaking habits all at once, he is able to commit to avoid speaking to his friend until later in the day, when the topic of conversation may be different.*

## 2. **Rabbi Shraga Simmons, Teshuvah: Dry Cleaning for the Soul (aish.com) – Commit to move in the right direction even if you might still make mistakes.**

Resolving for the future? How can I make a commitment to never sin ever again? Is this realistic? Imagine a new child taking his first steps in front of the proud parents. He gets to his feet, takes a few steps – and collapses. The parents clap with excitement and joy. But if you analyze the scenario, shouldn't the parents be upset? After all, the child fell down!

The answer is obvious. A parent doesn't judge a child based on whether he walks or falls, but rather on whether he took a few steps in the right direction.

So, too, with the Almighty. We are not in competition with anyone but ourselves. What concerns Him is whether we're making a sincere effort to move in the right direction. God doesn't ask you to change in an area that is not yet feasible for you to change. We are commanded to be human beings, not angels. This means making a serious commitment to change – and taking the right steps at the right time ... Nothing that can stand in the way of persistence and determination. As the Talmud states, "In the way that a person wants to go, he will be led" (Makkot 10b).

Resolving for the future means, "I'll improve in the future even when I'm tired, cranky, disappointed" (Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits). The future serves as the litmus test for our repentance. If one manages to keep one's commitment, even in a difficult situation, then he has achieved complete teshuvah, as the following source describes.

## 3. **Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah 2:1 – If one's resolution is strong enough to prevent transgression when the opportunity arises again, then this is complete teshuvah.**

When is one's teshuvah complete?  
If he has an opportunity to repeat a transgression, but instead he resists – not because of fear [of being discovered] or lack of strength – but because of his teshuvah, then this person's teshuvah is complete.

אי זו היא תשובה גמורה? זה שבא לידו דבר שעבר בו ואפשר בידו לעשות, ופירש ולא עשה מפני התשובה, לא מיראה ולא מכשלון כח.

For example: a person once transgressed with a woman. At a later time, he is alone with her with the same desire. He has the same strength and they are in the same place, and he resists and does not transgress – this is complete teshuvah.

כיצד, הרי שבא על אשה בעבירה. ולאחר זמן נתייחד עמה והוא עומד באהבתו בה, ובכח גופו ובמדינה שעבר בה, ופירש ולא עבר: זהו בעל תשובה גמורה.

One should certainly not deliberately place himself in a situation where he might be tempted to sin; even without the situation coming about, God knows when a person's repentance is complete (Sefer Chasidim 157; Sha'arei Teshuvah 1:49).

## PART E. ASKING FORGIVENESS FROM SOMEONE YOU OFFENDED (MECHILAH - מחילה)

The above steps are to repair transgressions in the relationship between man and God (*bein adam l'Makom*). Regarding the relationships with one's fellow man (*bein adam l'chavero*), an additional component of asking for forgiveness, and if necessary making financial reimbursement, is required.

### 1. Rabbi Yosef Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 606:1 – Ask forgiveness from somebody you offended, even if it was only a verbal offense. This must be done three times, if necessary.

For wrongdoings against one's fellow man one must ask forgiveness from the offended party. Without this Yom Kippur will not atone for the transgression. Even if one offended the person with words alone [without financial or physical harm], one must still ask forgiveness.

If the offended party does not forgive him the first time, the offender must repeat his plea a second and third time accompanied by three other people. [Each reconciliation should be attempted in a different manner – Mishnah Berurah.] If the offended party still refuses to grant forgiveness, one is no longer required to persist.

עבירות שבין אדם לחבירו אין יום הכיפורים מכפר עד שיפייסנו; ואפילו לא הקניטו אלא בדברים, צריך לפייסו;

ואם אינו מתפייס בראשונה, יחזור וילך פעם שניה ושלישית, ובכל פעם יקח עמו שלשה אנשים [ויפייסנו בכל פעם במין ריצוי אחר - משנה ברורה ס"ק ג], ואם אינו מתפייס בשלשה פעמים אינו זקוק לו..

### 2. Mishnah Berurah 606:1 – Pay back any money that is owed, even if the victim does not know that it is still owed to him.

If one stole or overcharged one must pay back the money or items ... Even if the other person does not know that he has a legal claim to the money you are holding, you must inform him. At the very least, put the matter straight according to the truth, with the advice of a competent Halachic authority. The general principle is [use a third party and] do not rely on your own judgment when it comes to monetary disputes, since a person's bias (*yetzer hara*) will convince him that everything is permissible.

אם יש בידו מן הגזל ואונאה וכל דבר הנוגע בממון יראה לתקן ... ואם יש לחבירו בידו ממון שיש לו תביעה עליהם יודיענו, אע"פ שחבירו לא ידע מזה כלל. ועל כל פנים יסדר לפני הרב ומורה צדק הענין בשלימות ובאמת בלא שקר, ולשאול האיך להתנהג. כללו של דבר, כל דבר שבממון לא יסמוך על הוראתו כי היצר הרע יש לו התירים הרבה.

If one caused mental anguish along with the financial damage, payment is not sufficient and the offender must also ask forgiveness from the other person (Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah 2:9). For example:

*One winter day, a boy threw a rock and broke the window of a classroom, leaving the students shivering in the cold. The principal told the boy that payment for the window would not be sufficient, and that he must ask the students forgiveness for the discomfort he caused them (Rabbi Avrohom Ehrman, Journey to Virtue, p. 171).*

If one spoke *lashon hara* about someone else, then one should consult with a Halachic authority about how to ask for forgiveness. This is because if you inform the person that you spoke slander about him, it may further hurt his feelings and exacerbate the original mistake (Sefer Chofetz Chaim, Hilchot Lashon Hara 4:12, Be'er Mayim Chaim 4:48; Mo'adim u'Zmanim 1:54).

The next source illustrates how important it is to grant as well as receive forgiveness.

### 3. **Rabbi Avraham Danzig, Prayer for Yom Kippur Eve (Tefillah Zakkah) – We extend forgiveness to everyone on Yom Kippur – even those who did not ask for it – in order that they should have the opportunity to do teshuvah.**

But since I know that there is hardly a righteous person in the world who never sins between man and his fellow, either monetarily or physically, in deeds or in speech, therefore my heart aches within me, because for a sin between man and his neighbor, Yom Kippur does not atone until one appeases his neighbor ...

Therefore, I extend complete forgiveness to everyone who has sinned against me, whether physically or monetarily, or who has gossiped about me or even slandered me. So, too, to anyone who has injured me, either physically or financially, regarding any interpersonal law ... And just as I forgive everyone, so may You grant me favor in every person's eyes, so that he will grant me complete forgiveness.

ולהיות שידעתי שכמעט אין צדיק בארץ אשר לא יחטא בין אדם לחברו בממון או בגופו, במעשה או בדבור פה. ועל זה דוה לבי בקרבי כי על חטא שבין אדם לחברו אין יום הכפורים מכפר עד שירצה את חברו...

והנני מוחל במחילה גמורה לכל מי שחטא נגדי. בין בגופו ובין בממונו. או שדבר עלי לשון הרע. ואפלו הוצאת שם רע. וכן לכל מי שהזיק לי בגופי או בממוני. ולכל חטאת האדם אשר בין אדם לחברו... וכשם שאני מוחל לכל אדם כן תתן את חני בעיני כל אדם שימחלו לי במחילה גמורה:

#### KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:

- ∞ The teshuvah process consists of the following four steps:
- ∞ **Regret (*charatah*).** Realize the extent of the damage and feel sincere regret that “it just wasn’t worth it.” Regret is constructive since it spurs you on to realize your potential. Guilt is paralyzing since it just makes you feel bad about yourself.
- ∞ **Cessation (*azivat ha’chet*).** Immediately stop the harmful action. Without cessation it’s like trying to purify in a mikvah while holding a source of impurity. Or it’s like pleading your case to the judge while stoned!
- ∞ **Confession (*viduy*).** Articulate the mistake privately to God and ask for forgiveness. In this way one is taking responsibility for his actions. Additionally, expressing your feelings with words makes them much more real and lasting.

- ⌘ Resolution for the future (*kabalah l'ha'bah*). Make a firm commitment not to repeat the wrongdoing in the future. Although you may fall again, your resolve to move in the right direction is extremely valuable. If that's too much, one can start by fixing at least one aspect of the transgression.

If the wrongdoing involves another person, a fifth component is necessary: one must ask forgiveness (*mechilah*) and if necessary reimburse the offended individual.

In practice, the order of the teshuvah process may be varied.

## SECTION II. BROADER APPROACHES TO TESHUVAH

Apart from the classic steps of teshuvah to correct mistaken past actions, as discussed above, one of the central themes of repentance is self-improvement. In this section we will examine the concept and methods of character improvement, addressing the deep roots of personal wrongdoing.

### PART A. CHANGING YOUR CHARACTER TRAITS

*This is what teshuvah requires, a thorough search of one's character to discover what allowed the transgression to occur, and then making the necessary changes in one's character to prevent the recurrence of the misdeed. (Rabbi Avraham J. Twerski, Let Us Make Man, CIS Publications, p. 82).*

1. **Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah 7:3 – One must also do teshuvah on his character traits and life attitudes. This can be harder than improving one's outward actions.**

It is a mistake to think that teshuvah is required only for actions done with one's body, such as immoral relations, theft, or robbery.

Rather, one is required to search out and do teshuvah even for negative character traits and incorrect life attitudes. Examples requiring teshuvah include: anger; hatred; jealousy; mockery; excessively chasing after money, honor, and food; and all similar negative traits.

These character faults are harder to deal with than wrong actions, because it is very difficult to eradicate a character fault that is enmeshed [in one's personality].

אל תאמר שאין תשובה אלא מעבירות שיש בהן מעשה כגון זנות וגזל וגניבה,

אלא כשם שצריך אדם לשוב מאלו, כך הוא צריך לחפש בדעות רעות שיש לו ולשוב מן הכעס, ומן האיבה, ומן הקנאה, ומן ההתול, ומרדיפת הממון והכבוד, ומרדיפת המאכלות וכיוצא בהן מן הכל צריך לחזור בתשובה.

ואלו העונות קשים מאותן שיש בהן מעשה, שבזמן שאדם נשקע באלו קשה הוא לפרוש מהם.

2. **Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, Ohr Yechezkel, Vol. II, Sichot Elul, p. 35 – Character improvement is central to Judaism. Improving one's character can be more important than improving one's actions.**

There is a great obligation to uproot our character faults ... Though we may think that character improvement is an optional, extra step for the

... גודל החיוב בעקירת מדותינו הרעות ... ואילו אנו מדמים בנפשינו כי תקון המדות אינו אלא מדת

saintly ... in truth character improvement is one of the basic principles of Judaism. Sometimes character faults can be more serious than transgressions themselves ...

Therefore, one must be more careful in improving one's character traits than with refraining from sins, since their proper development relates to the entire Torah ...

חסידות ומדרכי המוסר ... הוא מעיקרי העבודה  
וחמורים המה יותר מעבירות...

שיותר צריך האדם להזהר במדות יותר מהעבירות.  
ועיי"ש שכתב מטעם אחר שהם כוללים כל התורה  
... כולה...

### 3. The Vilna Gaon, Even Shleimah, Ch. 1 – The purpose of life is to perfect one's character.

Man was created in order to refine his negative character traits. If a person does not do this, then why is he alive?

עיקר חיות האדם הוא להתחזק תמיד בשבירת  
המידות. ואם לאו למה לו חיים.

As the following story illustrates, improving oneself ultimately leads one to improve the world.

*In 1923, the Chofetz Chaim was asked to be the keynote speaker at the first Agudath Israel convention in Vienna. He was asked specifically to speak on the subject of how he became "the Chofetz Chaim" – the world-renowned leader of Torah Jewry.*

*The Chofetz Chaim answered that he saw the deficiencies in the Jewish world and he decided he had to change things. So he tried to change the Jewish world, and he couldn't. So he said he would change the Jews of his country, Poland. He tried, and he couldn't. So he said he would change the Jews of his town, Radin. He tried to change the Jews of his town, Radin, and he couldn't. So he said he would change the Jews of his synagogue. He tried, and he couldn't. So he said he would change the members of his family. He tried, and he couldn't.*

*So finally he said, "Let me change myself." And when he changed himself, he became the "Chofetz Chaim" and he was able to change the Jews of the world. (Rabbi Jeff Forsythe, shemayisrael.com)*

#### PART B. RAISING YOUR ASPIRATIONS

*I was the most popular girl in college. I had friends. I was pretty. There were parties on Thursday night, Friday night, and Saturday night. I was living the Hollywood dream that I had aspired to since seeing my first episode of Beverly Hills 90210. I had made it!*

*After a night on the town, I woke up one Friday morning. All my girlfriends had slept over that night. It was 11am and we were already planning where to go that night, who would be there, and what to drink. Hopes were high for another night of fun.*

*I sat there listening, absorbed in my own thoughts. I considered doing this for another two years of college, or for another 20 years of life. And then it hit me, "This is it?! Another round of parties, just like last week? This is my whole life?! This is as good as life gets?!"*

*And so it was, on that fateful Friday morning, unbeknown to any of my friends, I realized that my 13-year-old life aspirations to emulate the characters of Beverly Hills 90210 had just expired.*

*I didn't know where I was going yet, but I knew I could aspire to more than just parties, beers, and hangovers. (True story told by S.T., Chicago.)*

While a person can certainly improve his *actions* and his *character*, his scope for change is defined by his aspirations. In the next source we will see how important raising our aspirations can be.

1. **Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits, Jerusalem, Speech on first night of Selichot (2008) – Real teshuvah means the ability to think differently about what you can expect from yourself.**

There's a fundamental problem when it comes to teshuvah. Because who sets the standards? Us. And who says we're setting the right standards? Us. And who says that we expect enough of ourselves? Us.

Stories are told of great people: had they remained "normal" people and not become great by exerting themselves, they may have gotten to Heaven and found out that they were guilty of murder since they denied the Jewish people of so much.

And we say the same too: "Some day I'll be great, but this is good enough for where I am now. And besides I have to be *normal*! So, I'll be small. And I'm staying small and that's ok."

That's our teshuvah? The real process has to be taking dreams and turning them into reality. Changing what you can expect of yourself. Our perceptions of ourselves, our conceptualizations of ourselves are within the realm of comfortable. Leave your comfort levels today! If you have dreams for the future, they will always remain for the future, unless you can let go of comfort and think realistically: "How can I demand more of myself in Torah study, in character refinement, in my acts of kindness? How can I make prayer be an emotional experience, where I sing and feel the verses? That when I say the Shema, nothing else exists except Him?"

Take a step outside of yourself and ask yourself: "What do I need to do in order to change the way I think?" Real teshuvah means to have the strength to think about what you were too uncomfortable to think about yesterday, and turn our dreams into reality. What has to change today? For real! "I'll be good, I'll be good," means nothing without a concrete plan.

If you do the same old teshuvah as in the past, and last year it didn't move you, then it's not going to move you now. It didn't work and it doesn't work. So think differently this time.

## PART C. DOING GOOD DEEDS

Although the initial steps of teshuvah consist of regret, cessation, confession, and resolution (see Section I), a higher form of teshuvah consists of doing good deeds (Zohar 3:123a). As King David summarizes, "Depart from evil, and do good" (Tehillim/Psalms 34:15). Essential elements of this higher form of teshuvah involving good deeds are: prayer, deeds of kindness to others, and the study of Torah (Emunos v' De'os 5:5; Berachot 5b).

The next source elaborates:

1. **Rabbeinu Yonah, Sha'arei Teshuvah 1:35 – Do good deeds with the same enthusiasm and the same parts of the body with which one transgressed.**

The Sages tell us, "If you did bundles of transgressions, now do bundles of good deeds" (Vayikra/Leviticus Rabbah 21:4). If one's legs ran to do transgressions, now run to do mitzvot. If one's tongue lied, then use one's tongue to speak truth, wisdom, and teachings of kindness. If one's hands spilt blood, then open your hands to give to your needy brother ... If you once caused fights, now pursue peace.

עוד אמרו (ויקרא רבה כא, ד): אם עשית חבילות של עברות עשה כנגדן חבילות של מצוות, רגלים ממהרות לרוץ לרעה - יהיו רצות לדבר מצוה, לשון שקר - אמת יהגה חכו ופיו יפתח בחכמה ותורת חסד על לשונו, ידים שופכות דם - פתוח יפתח את ידו לאחיו לענייו ... משלח מדנים בין אחים - יבקש שלום וירדפהו.



For example, someone who wishes to do teshuvah for verbal abuse, theft and so on, should try to teach and spread knowledge of these mitzvot and prohibitions and encourage others to observe them (Rabbi Avrohom Ehrman, Journey to Virtue 18:25).

The following story about the origin of the Nobel Prize illustrates this point.

*Alfred Nobel was born on October 21, 1833 in Stockholm, Sweden, into a family of engineers. He was a chemist, engineer, and inventor. Nobel amassed a fortune during his lifetime, most of it from his 355 inventions, of which dynamite is the most famous.*

*In 1888 he had the opportunity to read his own obituary while still alive. In truth, Alfred's brother Ludwig had died and the mistaken publication of Alfred's obituary by a French newspaper, condemning his invention of dynamite, is said to have made him decide to leave a better legacy to the world after his death. The obituary stated, "The merchant of death is dead," and went on to say, "Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before, died yesterday."*

*Nobel was disappointed with what he read and concerned with how he would be remembered. He decided that he should bring good to the world as well, and so he invested \$4.2 million (in 1896 currency, which is \$103 million in 2007 currency) to start a fund to encourage outstanding progress in peace, medicine, literature, physics, chemistry, and physiology. An annual prize would be given to those who conferred the "greatest benefit on mankind." Hence, the inventor of dynamite started the Nobel Prize. (From Encyclopedia Britannica, and The Life of Alfred Nobel.)*

#### KEY THEMES OF SECTION II:

- The teshuvah process includes changing one's character. Although this may be harder than changing one's outward actions, it is of great importance, since changing one's character is like treating the causes of a problem, whereas changing one's actions is like treating the symptoms.
- Even more significant than changing our character traits is examining the standards we hold ourselves to and modifying our aspirations in life.
- Another approach to teshuvah is to do good deeds with the same enthusiasm and in the same areas in which one transgressed.
- An important addition is that the process of self-perfection, like the "resolution for the future" of the previous section, is a gradual process. If "Rome wasn't built in a day," all the more so a person cannot be built in a day. The most important thing is that we move in the right direction.

## SECTION III. WHEN SHOULD A PERSON DO TESHUVAH?

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Are there specific times when one should do teshuvah? Or perhaps there are days when it should be avoided?

### PART A. TESHUVAH IS FOR EVERY DAY OF ONE'S LIFE

The following source, taken from the standard daily prayers, indicates that teshuvah can, and should be done at any time.

1. **Shemoneh Esrei, ArtScroll Complete Siddur, p. 102 – Three times a day we ask God to help us return to Him.**

Bring us back, our Father, to Your Torah, and bring us near, our King, to Your service. And influence us to return in perfect repentance before You. Blessed are You, God, Who desires repentance.

השיבנו אבינו לתורתך, וקרבתנו מלכנו לעבודתך, והחזירנו בתשובה שלמה לפניך. ברוך אתה ה', הרוצה בתשובה.

2. **Midrash, Devarim Rabbah 2:12 – The gates of teshuvah are always open.**

The gates of teshuvah are always open.

שערי תשובה לעולם פתוחים.

The doors of teshuvah only remain open as long as a person is alive. After death, the doors are closed and teshuvah is not possible (Kohelet/Ecclesiastes 9:10). Our Sages teach us that just as additional oil cannot rekindle an extinguished lamp, so teshuvah cannot redeem an extinguished life (Yalkut Shimoni ibid.). The following source elaborates on this point.

3. **Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 153a – Since a person does not know how long he will live, he should do teshuvah everyday.**

Rabbi Eliezer said, “Return [i.e. do teshuvah] one day before your death.”

Rabbi Eliezer’s students asked him, “[How is this possible?] Does a person know on which day he will die?”

He replied, “[You’re right, a person does not know when he will die,] therefore a person should do teshuvah today, in case he dies tomorrow. In this way he will have done teshuvah every day.”

רבי אליעזר אומר “שוב יום אחד לפני מיתתך.”

שאלו תלמידיו את רבי אליעזר “וכי אדם יודע איזהו יום ימות?”

אמר להן “וכל שכן ישוב היום שמא ימות למחר ונמצא כל ימיו בתשובה.”

Based on this a person should always see himself as if he were about to die. This way he will do teshuvah immediately if he transgresses (Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah 7:2).

*Every moment of life is like a precious coin with which to pay our fare across the river of this world. Even if many coins have been wasted, as long as one remains, there is always hope of crossing the river to our destination (Chovot HaLevavot 7:10, end).*

This is poignantly illustrated by the following story.

*Late one night, R’ Yisrael Salanter chanced to enter a shoemaker’s home. The shoemaker was sitting and doing his work by the flickering light of a candle that was about to go out. “Why are you still working?” asked R’ Yisrael. “The hour is late. Besides your candle will go out soon and you won’t be able to finish.”*

*“That’s no problem,” answered the shoemaker. “As long as the candle is burning, it is still possible to work and to repair.”*

*R’ Yisrael was deeply impressed by these words, for if one must work for his physical needs as long as the*



*candle is lit, how much more so must a person work for his spiritual improvement as long as the soul – “God’s candle” – is in him (Sparks of Mussar, edited by Rabbi Chaim Ephraim Zaitchik).*

So precious is teshuvah, that even on the last day of one’s life a person does teshuvah and says a confession (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 338).

## PART B. ELUL AND THE TEN DAYS OF REPENTANCE

Although one can always do teshuvah, God has set aside the ten days between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur inclusively as the special Ten Days of Teshuvah (Rosh HaShanah 18a). As the next source describes, the Hebrew month of Elul (lasting 30 days) serves as a preparation to the Ten Days of Teshuvah.

### 1. Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, *Sefer HaToda’ah (The Book of Our Heritage)*, p. 651 – From the beginning of Elul we begin returning to our Beloved.

“I am for my Beloved, and my Beloved is for me”  
(Shir HaShirim/Song of Songs 6:3).

The Hebrew first letters of the above verse spell *Elul*. During this month, the Jewish people strengthen themselves to do teshuvah and come close to their Beloved, The Holy One. At the same time, God also stretches out His hand to accept the Jewish people and comes close to them.

Each word in the verse ends with the letter *yud*. Four times *yud* equals forty, which hints at the forty days that are set aside for teshuvah from the beginning of Elul until Yom Kippur.

“אני לדודי ודודי לי” (שיר השירים פרק ו, ג).

ראשי תבות: אלול. שבחדש זה כנסת ישראל מתחזקת בתשובה, ומתקרבת לדודה שהוא הקדוש ברוך הוא: ואף הקב"ה פושט ידו לקבלה ומתקרב אליה.

וארבע תבות אלה מסתימות כל אחת באות יו"ד, וארבע פעמים יו"ד מספרם ארבעים, רמז לארבעים הימים שנועדו לתשובה, מראש חדש אלול עד יום הכיפורים.

The next source addresses the question: what is the difference between the teshuvah of Elul and the Ten Days of Teshuvah?

### 2. Rabbi Shimshon Pinkus, *The Days of Awe*, p. 289 – During Elul we do teshuvah on our actions, but during the Ten Days of Repentance we can do teshuvah on who we are.

There is in fact a fundamental difference between Elul and the Ten Days of Repentance, which starts with Rosh HaShanah.

The main concept of teshuvah throughout the year and during Elul is teshuvah for individual deeds. We return from each and every transgression. In contrast, during the Ten Days of Teshuvah we focus on improving the essence of the person himself ...

Because we are unable to turn into new people without help, God enters the picture. This is the teshuvah of Rosh HaShanah and the Ten Days of Repentance!

אלא באמת ההבדל בין אלול לבין ראש השנה ועשרת ימי תשובה הוא מהותי.

עיקר הסוגיה של תשובה במהלך השנה כולה בכלל, ובמהלך חודש אלול בפרט, הוא נושא של תשובה על מעשים, זאת אומרת לחזור בתשובה על כל חטא וחטא בפני עצמו. לעומת זאת הסוגיה של תשובה בעשרת ימי תשובה זוהי תשובה על עצם צורת האדם. ...

וכיון שהאדם לא יכול להפוך את עצמו ל"איש" חדש לבדו, לכן כביכול הקב"ה נכנס לתמונה, זוהי התשובה של ר"ה [ועשרת ימי תשובה]!

## PART C. ROSH HASHANAH

The Ten Days of Teshuvah are initiated by Rosh HaShanah, whose main symbolic commandment is the sounding of the shofar (hollowed out ram's horn). As the next source describes, one of the symbolisms of the shofar is to awaken our hearts to God.

### 1. **Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah 3:4 – The shofar on Rosh HaShanah is the ultimate spiritual alarm clock.**

The sound of the shofar on Rosh HaShanah symbolizes the following message, “Sleepers, wake up! Slumberers, regain consciousness! Examine your actions, and return with teshuvah. Remember your Creator, those of you who forget the truth in the vicissitudes of time, those of you who waste the years with insignificance. Look into your souls, improve your ways!”

שופר בראש השנה ... רמז יש בו, כלומר “עוררו עוררו ישינים משינתכם, והקיצו נרדמים מתרדמתכם, וחפשו במעשיכם, וחזרו בתשובה, וזכרו בוראכם, אלו השוכחים את האמת בהבלי הזמן, ושוגים כל שנתם בהבל וריק אשר לא יועיל ולא יציל. הביטו לנפשותיכם, והטיבו דרכיכם, ומעלליכם.”

## PART D. YOM KIPPUR

### 1. **Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah 2:7 – Yom Kippur is an auspicious time for teshuvah, and therefore we confess numerous times on this day!**

Yom Kippur is an auspicious time for teshuvah for everyone – for individuals and for the community as a whole ... Therefore, everyone is obligated to do teshuvah and to confess on Yom Kippur ... the first confession is said in the afternoon service (Minchah) before the pre-Yom Kippur meal; then again in the evening service (Maariv); again in the morning service (Shacharit); and in the additional service (Mussaf); in the afternoon service; and the closing service (Neilah).

יום הכפורים הוא זמן תשובה לכל, ליחיד, ולרבים ... לפיכך חייבים הכל לעשות תשובה ולהתודות ביום הכפורים, ומצות וידוי יום הכפורים שיתחיל מערב היום קודם שיאכל ... חוזר ומתודה בלילי יום הכפורים ערבית, וחוזר ומתודה בשחרית, ובמוסף ובמנחה, ובנעילה.

## PART E. FAST DAYS

Finally, the five annual fast days (Fast of Gedalya, 10<sup>th</sup> of Tevet, Fast of Esther, 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, Tishah B'Av) are special times of introspection and returning to God.

### 1. **Mishnah Berurah 549:1 – The purpose of a fast day is to improve oneself – refraining from food is secondary.**

On a fast day every person should engage in introspection, evaluate his actions, and do teshuvah – because the essence of the day is *not* merely to abstain from food. Just as it is written regarding the people of Nineveh: “And God saw their [improved] behavior.” The Sages explain: it

חייב כל איש לשום אל לבו באותן הימים, ולפשפש במעשיו, ולשוב בהן כי אין העיקר התענית כמו שכתוב באנשי נינוה “וירא ה' את מעשיהם” ואמרו חז”ל “את שקם ואת תעניתם” לא נאמר אלא “את מעשיהם” ואין התענית אלא הכנה לתשובה.

does not say that God saw their fasting and sack clothes, but rather that He saw “their [improved] behavior” [Ta’anit 16a]. For fasting is only a preparation for teshuvah.

Therefore, those people who go for strolls and waste away the day when they fast, have placed that which is secondary [fasting from food] over that which is primary [teshuvah].

לכן אותם האנשים שכשהם מתענים הולכים במיור  
ובדברים בטלים תפשו הטפל והניחו העיקר...

### KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:

- ∞ When a person leaves this world, he can no longer change himself or correct his past. Since a person never knows when he will die, he should therefore consider every day to be his last. In other words, a person should do teshuvah everyday of his life.
- ∞ The Ten Days of Repentance (from Rosh HaShanah to Yom Kippur) and the month of Elul which precedes it, have been set aside by God specifically for the purpose of teshuvah. This theme is keenly reflected by the shofar blasts on Rosh HaShanah – the ultimate spiritual alarm clock – and the confessions of Yom Kippur.
- ∞ Additionally, the purpose of the five annual fast days is to improve ourselves – refraining from food is secondary.

## SECTION IV. PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR TESHUVAH

In this section we will present practical tools for life-changing teshuvah.

### 1. **Rabbi Noach Weinberg, Spiritual Accounting System (aish.com) – Everyone has to ask himself: Why am I alive? What am I living for?**

If you ask someone: Are you eating to live, or living to eat? Of course he’ll tell you he’s eating to live.

Now ask him: What are you living for? He won’t always have a good answer, but at least you made him think about what he’s doing in life. Unfortunately the majority of humanity is very busy doing and accomplishing, but they don’t know for what ...

A man I know in Jerusalem was accidentally shot, and as a result became a paraplegic. While lying in the hospital, he was faced with this question: “What is life all about? What am I living for?” Today he will tell you that God did him a great favor by paralyzing him; otherwise he may have gone through his entire life without ever asking this fundamental and crucial question ...

The biggest individual fence against wasting your life is *Cheshbon Hanefesh* – Spiritual Accounting. You need a regular system to evaluate how well you performed and take stock of where you stand.

The following questions are suggested to help a person take stock of his life:

1. How do you wish to be remembered after you die? What impact do you wish your life to have? In other words: what are you living for?

*One quick way to wake yourself up to where you are going with your life is to imagine being conscious at your own eulogy. What will people say about you? “Mr. Porter earned \$50,000 a year, owned a yacht, and paid his parking tickets on time”? What do you want them to say about you? Now’s the time to figure out what the answer to that question is, and the rest of your life is for making yourself into the kind of person they can talk about in that way.*

2. If you had one year left to live, how would you spend your time?

*Don’t evade the question; for some people, this will be their last year of life. This question forces us to cut through the trivial and focus on our key priorities in life.*

3. What is the purpose of life? Write a short, succinct personal life mission statement that reflects your answers.
4. What did I do today to fulfill my purpose in life? (Based on Rabbi Noach Weinberg.)

Another technique is to monitor one’s performance in the three areas of:

1. Relationships with others (*bein adam l’chavero*)
2. Relationships with God (*bein adam l’Makom*)
3. Relationships with yourself (*bein adam l’atsmo*)

Pick a very small point for improvement in all three areas and then chart your progress, as in the following example (based on Rabbi Asher Resnick, Jerusalem):

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Shabbat	Sun
Relationships with others: <b>Find one opportunity to extend kindness to others each day.</b>							
Relationships with God: <b>Recite the Shema each night before going to sleep.</b>							
Relationships with yourself: <b>Think ten seconds to formulate a calm response in an anger-prone situation.</b>							

2. **Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits, Jerusalem, heard in person – Identify your personality strengths, which really define who you are. Then pick one obstacle to remove that is preventing you from becoming great in that strength.**

People mistakenly think that self-awareness means knowing one's shortcomings. But more important and fundamental is knowing your strengths. The form that your greatness will take depends on what strengths God gave you personally. So therefore:

**Step 1: Write down all the strengths that God gave you.**

Figure out what strengths *you've* been given. Ask yourself: in what way do you think you're special? We're not talking about skills like playing music or dancing well, but rather some aspect of your personality that's expressed as music or dance: sensitivity, creativity, stamina, love of life, making other people happy. Include everything.

The goal is not to become someone else. Who said you're meant to be what you read in the biographies about great people? Granted every Jew is meant to be great, without exception, but it's *your* greatness that's required.

**Step 2: Write down what's blocking you from becoming great in each strength.**

You have to answer:

- What shortcomings stand in the way of my developing each of these strengths fully?
- So why am I not great in these strengths? Why am I just potential?

**Step 3: Pick one (or two) obstacles to work on.**

Once you identify who you are – i.e. what personality strengths you have – and what's holding you back, start working on those blocks. Start with the easiest obstacle that presents itself in a certain situation. Then keep a record of your progress (either on paper or mentally). As long as the block is still present, and is a bit of a struggle, do not go further. Keep at it until the obstacle is removed and the strength can come out. Once it's easy, move on to the next obstacle to actualize the next strength.

In summary: isolate blocks, and when they become easy to deal with, move on. This way you build a momentum. And you'll see that improving your character is exciting.

For example:

*Laziness: Even though you could be disciplined, you have a habit of giving in to laziness. You might not brush your teeth before going to sleep, even though you want to. Keep a mental record. When you see that it's easy for you to brush your teeth at night, pick another block such as maintaining a proper sleeping schedule.*

*Discipline: You want to study for an upcoming test, but you find that speaking on your cell phone or texting always interrupts things. Isolate the first 20 minutes of your study session. And turn off your phone for those 20 minutes. Once this is easy to do, then you can build up to longer periods.*

**KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV:**

- ∞ A person has to regularly examine: “What am I living for? If I had one year left to live, how would I spend my time?” These types of questions help a person take stock of his life. They re-focus him on the “big picture.”
- ∞
- ∞ It’s much more important to identify your strengths than your weaknesses. Your strengths are who you really are. Your weaknesses are just obstacles that stand in the way. Undertake an incremental program to remove one block at a time, to become truly great.

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## CLASS SUMMARY:

**WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF TESHUVAH?**

The basics of teshuvah consist of four components: regret, cessation, confession, and resolution for the future. All of these components are essential for a person’s repentance to be complete.

**CAN I REALLY RESOLVE NEVER TO REPEAT A MISTAKE?**

Although it may seem daunting to commit to never repeat a mistake, it is possible to make incremental improvement. Make a firm resolution to fix at least *part* of a transgression. This contributes to the goal of fixing the entire transgression. Resolve to move in the right direction even if you repeat mistakes.

**WHAT IF YOU ATTEMPT TO BECOME RECONCILED WITH SOMEONE AND HE REFUSES YOUR REQUEST?**

If one harmed or hurt another person (even emotionally), one must ask forgiveness and reimburse him. If the offended party does not grant forgiveness the first time, the offender must repeat his plea a second and third time accompanied by three other people. If the offended party still refuses to grant forgiveness, one is no longer required to persist.

**WHY IS TESHUVAH ON ONE’S CHARACTER TRAITS SOMETIMES MORE IMPORTANT THAN IMPROVING ONE’S ACTIONS?**

Although changing one’s outward actions may be easier, it is more important to change one’s character, since changing one’s character is like treating the causes of a problem, whereas changing one’s actions is like treating the symptoms. A person should not be alarmed if he sees that there is much to change and refine. Everyone has much to change, and teshuvah is a gradual process. The main thing is the direction.

**WHEN SHOULD A PERSON DO TESHUVAH?**

Every day! After one leaves this world, one can no longer change oneself or correct his past. Since a person never knows when he will die, he should therefore consider every day to be his last. Additionally, certain dates on the Jewish calendar are dedicated to teshuvah: Yom Kippur, Rosh HaShanah, and fast days.

## ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING & SOURCES

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### Section I, Step 3. Confession (*viduy*) – Taking Responsibility

Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zarah 17a – The story of Rabbi Elazar ben Dordaya, who realized after a lifetime of transgression, “It’s up to me, no one else can take responsibility!”

Sefer HaChinuch #364 (The mitzvah of confession and teshuvah) – Regret and confession. Verbally expressing one’s mistakes (1) makes one realize that God is aware of our actions, and (2) increases the chances that we will not repeat them.

### Section III, Part B. Elul and the Ten Days of Repentance

Tur, Orach Chaim 581 – The month of Elul and the blast of the shofar

Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah 18a – Seek God when He is found

Rema, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 603:1 – A time to repent