

חובות הלבבות • שער התשובה • פרק ראשון

Sentence by Sentence • Punctuated Hebrew with Translation and Notes • Navy & Gold Edition

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This first chapter of Shaar HaTeshuvah lays the groundwork for understanding what repentance truly means. We will explore the fundamental definition of teshuvah, recognizing it as the process of returning to Hashem's service after having strayed. The chapter outlines various reasons why one might depart from this path, from ignorance to the influence of the yetzer hara or negative company.

We will then delve into the two primary ways one can withdraw from Hashem's service: either by neglecting mitzvos or by actively transgressing prohibitions. The chapter explains how the path to teshuvah differs slightly depending on the nature of the transgression, using a powerful analogy of physical illness and recovery to illustrate these spiritual principles.

All introductions, summaries, and contextual notes are the editor's commentary and are not part of the original text.

ואומר בבאור מהות התשובה שטעם התקנת האדם לעבודת הבורא יתברך אחר יציאתו ממנה וקטאו בה והשבת מה שאבד ממנה, אם בעבור סכלותו באלהים ובעניני עבודתו.

I will explain the essence of teshuvah: the meaning of teshuvah is a person's preparation to return to the avodah of the blessed Creator after having departed from it and sinned against it, and to restore what was lost from it, whether due to his foolishness regarding Hashem and the matters of His service.

או שגבר יצרו על שכלו.

Or because his yetzer hara overpowered his intellect.

או להתעלמותו ממה שהוא חייב בו לאלהים.

Or due to his neglect of what he owes to Hashem.

או בעבור התחברותו לחברים רעים פתוהו וקטא בעבורם.

Or because of his association with bad friends who enticed him, and he sinned on their account.

וכיוצא בזה כמו שאמר החכם (משלי א) בנִי אִם יִפְתּוּךָ חַטָּאִים אַל תִּבָּא וְאָמַר (שם כד) יֵרָא אֶת ה' בְּנִי וּמִלֶּךְ עִם שׁוֹנִים אַל תִּתְעַרֵּב.

And similar reasons, as the wise man said (Mishlei 1:10), "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent," and he also said (Mishlei 24:21), "My son, fear Hashem and the king; and do not associate with those who are given to change."

והיציאה מעבודת הבורא על שני דרכים, אם בעזיבת מה שצוה הבורא לעשותו והתעלמותו ממנו או בעשות מה שהזהיר מעשותו וכוון בו להמרות את בוראו.

Departing from the Creator's avodah occurs in two ways: either by abandoning what the Creator commanded us to do and neglecting it, or by doing what He warned us not to do, with the intention to rebel against one's Creator.

ואם תהיה יציאתו מן העבודה בעזיבת מה שצוה הבורא לעשותו בלבד אפן תשובתו מקצורו יהיה בהשתדלו במעשה הנכון והדבקו בגדר התשובה אשר אני עתיד לבארם בזה השער.

If his departure from avodah was only by abandoning what the Creator commanded to do, then the way of his teshuvah for his shortcoming will be by exerting himself in the proper actions and clinging to the roots of teshuvah, which I am going to explain in this gate.

ואם היתה במה שהזהיר הבורא מעשותו אפן השגת קצורו יהיה בהשמרו מחזר אל כל מין המעשה ההוא ושישתדל לעשות הפכו עם הדבקו בגדר התשובה ותנאיה אשר אני עתיד לבארם בשער הזה בעזרת האל יתברך.

And if it was by doing what the Creator warned against, the way to rectify his failing will be by guarding himself from returning to any form of that act, and by striving to do its opposite, along with clinging to the roots and conditions of teshuvah which I am going to explain in this gate, with the help of the blessed G-d.

והדמיון בזה בענינים הטבעיים באדם שחלה גופו מחמת המזון אם מפני שנמנע מאכל מה שיש בו התמדת בריאותו או מפני שאכל מה שהזיקו והפסיד בריאותו.

The analogy for this in natural matters is a person whose body became ill due to food, either because he refrained from eating what would maintain his health, or because he ate something that harmed him and ruined his health.

וכשיהיה חליו ממעוט המזון אשר התמיד בו בריאותו אפן חזרתו אל הנכונה יהיה בהרבותו ממני המזונות הראויים לטבעו עד שישוב אל הגבול השווה וכשיחזר אל ענינו הראשון הטבעי ינהג במזונו המנהג השווה.

When his illness is due to a lack of the food that maintains his health, the way for him to return to a proper state will be by increasing the types of foods suitable for his nature until he returns to a balanced limit; and when he returns to his original natural state, he should maintain a balanced diet.

ואם יהיה חליו מפני שהתנהג במה שהזיקו מהמזון אפן בריאותו יהיה בהשמרו מן המזון ההוא והדומה לו ולהתנהג במה שהוא הפך מזגו וטבעו עד שישוב אל הענין השווה וכאשר יבריא גופו ויעמד על הגבול השווה לו יאכל מן המאכלים השווים בין שני המאכלים והאמצעיים בין שני המזגים וכבר דמה הכתוב העוונות במאכל הרע כמ"ש (ירמיהו ל"א:ל') כי אם איש בעונו ימות כל האדם האכל הבסר תקינה שניו:

And if his illness is because he habitually ate harmful food, the way to his healing will be by guarding himself from that food and similar ones, and by habitually eating what is opposite to its temperament and nature, until he returns to a balanced state. And when his body recovers and reaches its proper balance, he can eat foods that are midway between the two types of foods and intermediate between the two temperaments. The verse has already compared iniquities to bad food, as it is written (Yirmiyahu 31:29), "But every man shall die for his own iniquity; every person who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge."

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

Shaar HaTeshuvah Chapter One defines repentance as restoring oneself to Hashem's service after having deviated, whether due to ignorance, the yetzer hara, neglect, or bad company. It identifies two forms of deviation: abandoning positive mitzvos or actively transgressing prohibitions. For neglecting mitzvos, teshuvah involves increased effort in good deeds. For transgressing prohibitions, it requires abstaining from the forbidden act and actively pursuing its opposite. The chapter

illustrates these concepts with an analogy of recovering from illness caused by either poor diet or consuming harmful foods, emphasizing that the path to healing depends on the cause of the sickness.

למעשה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

The Chovos HaLevavos teaches us a profound truth about teshuvah: it's not just about saying sorry, but about actively restoring our connection to Hashem. He gives us a powerful mashal of a person who gets sick. Sometimes, we get sick because we *didn't* eat what was good for us. Other times, we get sick because we *did* eat what was bad for us. The cure, the teshuvah, is different for each.

This means our avodah isn't one-size-fits-all. If we've been neglecting a mitzvah, like davening with kavanah or learning Torah regularly, our teshuvah is to *add* to that area, to exert ourselves in doing the good we've missed. We need to build up that spiritual muscle. But if we've stumbled into an aveirah, something Hashem warned us against, our teshuvah is not just to stop, but to actively *do the opposite* of that negative action, to create a new, positive habit in its place. It's about uprooting the bad and planting good.

This isn't just theory; it's a roadmap for real growth. It reminds us that Hashem wants us back, and He's given us the tools to get there. We don't just sit and regret; we get up and *do*. We become active partners in our own spiritual healing, guided by His Torah.

So, for today, think about one area where you feel a bit distant from Hashem. Is it something you've neglected, or something you've done? Choose one small, concrete action to either *add* a mitzvah or *do the opposite* of a negative habit, and start there.