

חובות הלבבות • שער התשובה • פרק שני

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

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In this second chapter of Shaar HaTeshuvah, Rabbeinu Bachya begins by delving into the different categories of repentance. We will explore three distinct types of baalei teshuvah, each characterized by their unique approach and level of commitment to turning away from sin.

This chapter will help us understand the nuances of true teshuvah, distinguishing between superficial regret and a profound, heartfelt transformation. We will learn what constitutes complete repentance and what pitfalls to avoid on the path back to Hashem.

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

אבל חלקי התשובה הם שלשה.

The categories of teshuvah, however, are three.

אחד מהם השב מחמת שלא מצא דרך לעברה, וכשהוא מוצא, גובר יצרו על שכלו ולא ימנע ממנה.

One type is the person who repents because he didn't find a way to commit the transgression, but when he does find an opportunity, his yetzer hara overpowers his intellect, and he doesn't refrain from it.

וכאשר ישלים עשותה, יראה גנות מעשהו ויתחרט על מה שעבר בה.

And when he finishes doing it, he sees the shamefulness of his act and regrets what he did.

זה שב בפיהו לא בלבו, וב לשונו לא במעשהו, והוא חיב בענש הבורא יתברך.

This person repented with his mouth, not with his heart; with his tongue, not with his deeds; and he is liable for punishment from the blessed Creator.

ובו נאמר (שם ז): הגנב רצח ונאף והשבע לשקר וגו', המערת פריצים וגו'.

Concerning him, it is said (Yirmiya 7): 'Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, etc., and come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My Name, and say, 'We are saved'...? Has this house, which is called by My Name, become a cave of thieves in your eyes?'

והחלק השני: השב בלבו ובאבריו, ועומד בשכלו כנגד יצרו, ומתנהג להכריח נפשו ולהלחם עם תאוותיה עד שינצחנה וימנענה ממה שישנאהו הבורא יתברך.

The second type is the one who repents with his heart and with his limbs, and his intellect stands firm against his yetzer hara, and he trains himself to compel his soul and fight its desires until he overcomes it and restrains it from what the blessed Creator dislikes.

אֵלָא שְׁנַפְשׁוֹ רוֹצֶה לְהַטּוֹתוֹ תָּמִיד אֶל הַפֶּךְ עֲבוּדַת הַבּוֹרָא, וְשׂוֹאֶפֶת אֶל הָעֲבָרָה, וְהוּא מְשַׁתְּדֵל לְחַסֵּם אוֹתָהּ, וּפַעַם תִּנָּצְחָהּ וּפַעַם יִנָּצְחָנָהּ.

However, his soul always wants to incline him towards the opposite of serving the Creator and yearns for transgression, and he strives to block it; sometimes it overcomes him, and sometimes he overcomes it.

וְזֶה אֵינוֹ שָׁלֵם בְּדֶרֶךְ הַתְּשׁוּבָה שְׁמַחֲיֶכֶת לוֹ הַכִּפָּרָה, עַד שִׁיסּוֹר מִן הָעֲבֵרוֹת לְגִמְרִי, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב (ישעיה כו ט): לָכֵן בְּזֹאת יִכָּפֵר עֲוֹן יַעֲקֹב וְזֶה כָּל פְּרִי הַסֵּר חֲטָאתוֹ וְגו'.

This person is not complete in the path of teshuvah that obligates atonement for him, until he completely removes himself from transgressions, as it is written (Yeshaya 27:9): 'Therefore by this the guilt of Yaakov will be atoned for, and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin: when he makes all the stones of the altars like chalkstones crushed to pieces, no Asherim or incense altars will remain standing.'

וְהַחֲלָק הַשְּׁלִישִׁי: אָדָם שֶׁהִתְנַהֵּג בְּכָל תְּנָאֵי הַתְּשׁוּבָה, וְהִגְבִּיר שְׁכָלוֹ עַל תַּאֲוָתוֹ, וְהִתְמִיד לְחֹשֶׁב עִם נַפְשׁוֹ, וִירָא אֶת בּוֹרְאוֹ וּבוֹשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ.

The third type is a person who has fulfilled all the conditions of teshuvah, and has strengthened his intellect over his desires, and has consistently engaged in self-reckoning, and fears his Creator and is ashamed before Him.

וְהֵשִׁיב אֶל לְבוֹ גִּדְל חֲטָאוֹ וְעֲוֹנוֹ, וְהִפִּיר גִּדְלָת מִי שֶׁהִמְרָה אוֹתוֹ וְעָבַר עַל דְּבָרוֹ.

He takes to heart the greatness of his sin and transgression, and recognizes the immense greatness of the One against Whom he rebelled and Whose word he transgressed.

וְהֵצִיב עֲוֹנָתָיו לִנְגֵד עֵינָיו וּלְנִכְחוֹ תָּמִיד, מִתְחַרֵּט עֲלֵיהֶם וּמִבְקֵשׁ הַמַּחֲיֵלָה בָּהֶם כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּיו עַד בּוֹא קְצוֹ.

He constantly places his transgressions before his eyes and in his presence, regretting them and seeking forgiveness for them all the days of his life until his end comes.

וְזֶה רָאוּי אֶצֶל הַבּוֹרָא לְהִנָּצֵל.

This person is worthy before the Creator to be saved.

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

This chapter outlines three categories of repentance. The first type describes one who repents only when opportunity for sin is absent, but succumbs when it arises, regretting it afterward; this is deemed incomplete and deserving of punishment. The second type is one who repents in heart and deed, fighting his evil inclination, but still struggles with the desire to sin, sometimes succeeding and sometimes failing; this repentance is also incomplete and requires full renunciation of sin for atonement. The third and highest type is one who fulfills all conditions of teshuvah, strengthening his intellect over his desires, constantly fearing Hashem, regretting his sins, and praying for forgiveness throughout his life; this person is truly worthy of being spared.

My dear friend, the Chovos HaLevavos here gives us a powerful lens through which to view our own avodah. We all want to do teshuvah, to come closer to Hashem. But the Chovos HaLevavos shows us that there are different levels, and it's not enough to just say "I'm sorry" or even to try a little bit.

The key distinction is between the second and third types of baalei teshuvah. The second type fights his yetzer hara, sometimes winning, sometimes losing. He's trying, but his heart still *wants* the aveirah. The third type, the complete baal teshuvah, has elevated his intellect over his desires to such an extent that he truly *hates* the sin itself. He doesn't just refrain; he has transformed his inner being so that the sin is repulsive to him. This isn't about never falling, but about the deep, inner shift in desire.

This teaches us that true teshuvah isn't just about stopping an action, but about changing our inner will. It's about working on our middos, on our yiras Shamayim, until the very thought of transgressing Hashem's will becomes painful and undesirable. It's a lifelong process of refining our neshama, recognizing the greatness of Hashem and the ugliness of sin, until our hearts are truly aligned with His will.

So, for today, let's take a moment to reflect: Is there one area where I'm just fighting my yetzer hara, or can I work to truly transform my desire, to make the mitzvah beloved and the aveirah truly repulsive in my heart?