

חובות הלבבות • שער התשובה • פרק חמישי

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

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This chapter delves into the profound conditions necessary for true teshuvah, outlining twenty specific requirements across its four fundamental components. We will explore five detailed conditions for each aspect: regret, renouncing sin, beseeching forgiveness, and resolving not to repeat transgressions. Each condition is illuminated with pesukim from Tanach, guiding us to a deeper understanding of what complete repentance entails.

By meticulously examining these conditions, we gain insight into the inner workings of a penitent heart and the external actions that demonstrate genuine remorse and commitment to Hashem. The Rambam provides a clear roadmap for anyone seeking to draw closer to Hashem through the transformative power of teshuvah, ensuring that our efforts are sincere and complete.

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

אבל תנאי גדרי התשובה רבים מאד, אך אזכר מהם עשרים תנאים, ונבאר בכל גדר מגדרי התשובה חמשה תנאים, ובהם יהיה כל גדר מגדריה הארבעה שלם.

The conditions for the components of teshuvah are exceedingly numerous, but I will mention twenty of them, clarifying five conditions for each of the four components of teshuvah, through which each of its four components will be complete.

מהם תנאי החרטה חמשה.

Among these, the conditions for regret are five.

הראשון: היראה ממהירות ענש הבורא לחוטא על מה שקדם לו מן העונות, ותחזק בעבור זה חרטתו, כמו שנאמר (שם יג) "תנו לה' אלהיכם כבוד בטרם יחשך וגו'".

The first is the fear of the Creator's swift punishment for the sins one has already committed, and that his remorse should intensify because of this, as it is stated (Yirmiya 13:16), "Give glory to Hashem your G-d, before He causes darkness, etc."

והשני: שכירת לבו והכנעו לאלהים על מה שהיה ממנו מן החטא, כמו שנאמר (ד"ה ב ז) "יכנעו עמי אשר נקרא שמי עליהם".

The second is the breaking of his heart and his humbling himself before Elokim for the sin he committed, as it is stated (Divrei Hayamim II 7:14), "If My people, upon whom My Name is called, will humble themselves."

והשלישי: לשנות מלבושיו ותכשיטיו להראות סימני החרטה בדבריו ובמאכליו ובכל תנועותיו, כמו שנאמר (ירמיה ד) "על זאת חגרו שקים וגו'", ואמר (יונה ג:ח) "ויתכסו האדם והבהמה".

The third is to change his clothing and adornments, to show signs of remorse in his speech, in his eating, and in all his movements, as it is stated (Yirmiya 4:8), "Because of this, gird yourselves with sackcloth, etc.", and it says (Yonah 3:8), "Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth."

והרביעי: הבכי והצעקה והאבל מתחרט על מה שקדם לו מן החטא, כמו שנאמר (תהלים קיט) "פלגי מים ירדו עיני על לא שמרו תורתך", ואמר (יואל ב) "בין האולם ולמזבח יבכו הכהנים משרתי ה'".

The fourth is weeping, crying out, and mourning, expressing remorse for the sin he committed, as it is stated (Tehilim 119:136), "Rivers of waters run down my eyes because they did not keep Your commandments," and it says (Yoel 2:17), "Let the priests, the ministers of Hashem, weep between the porch and the altar."

והחמישי: שיוכיח נפשו ויכלימנה במצפונו על מה שהיה מקצורו בחובת הבורא יתעלה עליו, כמו שנאמר (שם) "וקרעו לבבכם ואל בגדיכם".

The fifth is that he should rebuke his soul and shame it inwardly for his shortcomings in fulfilling his obligations to the exalted Creator, as it is stated (Yoel 2:13), "And tear your hearts, and not your garments."

ותנאי העזיבה גם כן חמשה.

The conditions for abandoning sin are also five.

אחד מהם: עזיבת כל מה שהזהיר הבורא ממנו, כמו שנאמר (עמוס ה) "שנאו רע ואהבו טוב", ואמר (ישעיהו נ"ב:ב') "ושמר ידו מעשות כל רע", ואמר (שם נה) "יעזב רשע דרכו וגו'".

One of them is the abandonment of everything the Creator has warned against, as it is stated (Amos 5:15), "Hate the evil and love the good," and it says (Yeshayahu 56:2), "and guards his hand from doing any evil," and it says (Yeshayahu 55:7), "let the wicked abandon his way, etc."

והשני: עזיבת המתר המביא לידי אסור, כדברים המספקים אם מתירים הם או אסורים, כמו שנאמר על קצת החסידים שהיו פורשים משבעים שערים משערי המתר מיראתם שער אחד משערי האסור, וכמו הסגים שצוו עליהם רבותינו ז"ל ואמרו: "ועשו סג לתורה".

The second is the abandonment of that which is permitted but might lead to a prohibition, such as matters that are doubtful whether they are permitted or forbidden; as it is said of some of the pious that they would refrain from seventy categories of permitted things out of their fear of taking one category that is forbidden, and like the fences that our Sages, of blessed memory, commanded us, saying, "Make a fence for the Torah."

NOTE This refers to the Rabbinic principle of creating safeguards around Torah laws to prevent people from inadvertently transgressing them. It's about going beyond the letter of the law to ensure one stays far from sin.

והשלישי: שתהיה עזיבתו העברות אחר יכלתו עליהם והזדמנותן לו, לא ימנע מעשותם כי אם מיראת ענש הבורא, כמו שנאמר (תהלים קיט) "סמר מפחדך בש"י וממשפטך יראתי".

The third is that his abandonment of sins should be when he has the ability and opportunity to commit them, and he refrains from doing so only out of fear of the Creator's punishment, as it is stated (Tehilim 119:120), "My flesh bristles from fright of You, and I dread Your judgments."

והרביעי: שתהיה עזיבתו העברות מבשתו מן הבורא, לא מיראת בני אדם ולא לתקנתו אותם ולא לבשתו מהם, ולא יהיה כמו שנאמר בהם (ישעיהו כ"ט:י"ג) "ותהי יראתם אתי מצות אנשים מלמדה", ואמר (מלכים ב יב) "ויעש יהואש הישר בעיני ה' כל ימיו אשר הורהו יהויכד הכהן".

The fourth is that his abandonment of sins should stem from his shame before the Creator, not from fear of other people, nor from hoping for something from them, nor from being ashamed of them; and he should not be like those of whom it is stated (Yeshayahu 29:13), "And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote," and it says (Melachim II 12:3), "And Yehoash did what was proper in the eyes of Hashem all the days that Yehoyada the priest instructed him."

והחמישי: שִׁיעֹזֵב עֲשׂוֹת הָרָע עֲזִיבַת הַיָּאוֹשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ, שֶׁלֹּא יִתֵּן אֶל לְבוֹ לְשָׁנוֹת אֵלָיו, וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלִבּוֹ וּבִלְשׁוֹנוֹ כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר הַחֲסִיד (איוב לד) "אִם עוֹל פָּעַלְתִּי לֹא אֶסִּיף".

The fifth is that he should abandon doing evil with a complete sense of despair from it, so that it does not enter his heart to repeat it, and he should say in his heart and with his tongue, as the pious man said (Iyov 34:32), "If I have done iniquity, I will do so no more."

אַבְל תְּנֵאֵי בַקְשַׁת הַמַּחִילָה כְּמוֹ כֵּן חֲמִשָּׁה.

The conditions for seeking forgiveness are also five.

אֶחָד מֵהֶם: הַתְּוֹדָתוֹ בְּעֹנֶתָיו וּשְׂיָרְבוּ בְּעֵינָיו וּבְלִבּוֹ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר (ישעיהו נ"ט:י"ב) "כִּי רַבּוּ פְשָׁעֵינוּ נִגְדָּה".

One of them is his confession of his sins, and that they should appear numerous in his eyes and in his heart, as it is stated (Yeshayahu 59:12), "For our transgressions against You are many."

וְהַשְׁנִי: שֶׁיִּזְכֹּר אוֹתָם תָּמִיד וַיְשִׁימֵם לְנִגְדּוֹ וְנִכַּח פָּנָיו, כַּמִּי"ש (תהלים נא) "כִּי פְשָׁעִי אֲנִי אֶדַּע וְחַטָּאתִי נִגְדִּי תָמִיד".

The second is that he should always remember them and place them before him, opposite his face, as it is written (Tehilim 51:5), "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me."

וְהַשְּׁלִישִׁי: שֶׁיִּתְעַנֶּה בַּיּוֹם וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל בַּלַּיְלָה, עַתָּה שֶׁלִּבּוֹ פָּנוּי וְאֵין לוֹ טְרִדָּה בְּעַסְקֵי הָעוֹלָם, כַּמִּי"ש (איכה ב) "קוּמִי רִנִּי בַלַּיְלָה".

The third is that he should fast by day and pray at night, at a time when his heart is free and he is not distracted by worldly matters, as it is written (Eicha 2:19), "Arise, cry out in the night."

וְאֲנִי עֲתִיד לְבָאֵר מַעֲלַת תְּפִלַּת הַלַּיְלָה בְּעֶזְרַת הַשֵּׁם.

And I will later explain the greatness of prayer at night, with Hashem's help.

וְהָרְבִיעִי: שֶׁיִּתְחַנֵּן אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים וַיַּעֲטֵף אֵלָיו תָּמִיד לְכַפֵּר עֲוֹנוֹתָיו וְלִמְחֹל לוֹ וּלְקַבֵּל תְּשׁוּבָתוֹ, כַּמִּי"ש (תהלים לב) "חַטָּאתִי אֹדִיעָךְ וְעוֹנִי לֹא כִסִּיתִי וְגוֹ'", וְאָמַר (שם) "עַל זֹאת יִתְפַּלֵּל כָּל חֲסִיד אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְעַת מְצֵא".

The fourth is that he should plead to Elokim and constantly beseech Him to atone for his sins, to forgive him, and to accept his teshuvah, as it is written (Tehilim 32:5), "I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide, etc.", and it says (Tehilim 32:6), "Therefore, let every pious one pray to You at the time that You are found."

וְהַחֲמִישִׁי: שֶׁיִּטְרַח וַיִּשְׁתַּדֵּל לְהוֹדִיר בְּנֵי אָדָם מִכַּמּוֹת עֲבֻרוֹתָיו וּלְיִרְאָם מַעֲנֶשֶׁן וּלְהַזְכִּירָם בְּתִשׁוּבָה מֵהֶן, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב (יונה ג) "מִי יוֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנָחַם הָאֱלֹהִים", וְנֶאֱמָר (תהלים נא) "אֲלַמְּדָה פּוֹשְׁעִים דְּרָכֶיךָ".

The fifth is that he should labor and exert himself to warn other people about sins similar to his own, to make them fear their punishments, and to remind them to do teshuvah from them, as it is written (Yonah 3:9), "Who knows, Elokim may turn and relent," and it is stated (Tehilim 51:15), "I will teach transgressors Your ways."

וְתֵנֵאֵי הַקִּבְלָה שֶׁלֹּא יִשְׁנֶה לַעֲשׂוֹת מַה שֶׁהוֹדִיר מִמֶּנּוּ הַבּוֹרֵא חֲמִשָּׁה כְּמוֹ כֵּן.

The conditions for resolving not to repeat what the Creator has warned against are also five.

אֶחָד מֵהֶם: שִׁישָׁקֵל עֲרֻבוֹת מְהִירָה וְכוּלָּהּ מְעַרְבֶּכֶת בְּעֲרֻבוֹת מִתְאַחֶרֶת קִיָּמָה מִתְמַדָּת זָכָה מִבְּלִי קִדְרוֹת וְעֲרֻבוֹב, וְשִׁישָׁקֵל צָעַר מִהֵר כָּלָה אֵין לוֹ קִיָּמָה בְּצָעַר מִתְאַחֶר מִתְמַד אֵין לוֹ הַפְּסִק.

One of them is that he should weigh a fleeting, temporary pleasure, mixed with impurity, against a future, constant, everlasting pleasure, pure without any darkness or mixture of pain; and that he should weigh a fleeting, temporary pain, which has no permanence, against a future, constant, everlasting pain, which has no interruption.

כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב עַל הָעֲרֻבוֹת (ישעיהו ס"ו:כ"ד) "וּרְאִיתֶם וְשִׂשׁ לְבָבְכֶם", וְאָמַר עַל הַצָּעַר (שם) "וַיֵּצְאוּ וַיֵּרְאוּ בַּפְּגָרֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים וְגו'", וְאָמַר (מלאכי ג) "כִּי הִנֵּה הַיּוֹם בָּא בְּעֵר כְּתוֹנֹר וְהָיוּ כָּל יָדַיִם וְכָל עֹשֶׂה רָשָׁע וְגו'", וְאָמַר (שם) "וְזָרְחָה לָכֶם יְרֵאִי שְׁמִי שֶׁמֶשׁ צִדְקָה וְגו'".

As it is written concerning pleasure (Yeshayahu 66:14), "And when you see this, your heart shall rejoice," and it says concerning pain (Yeshayahu 66:24), "And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men, etc.", and it says (Malachi 3:19), "For behold, the day comes, burning like a furnace, and all the audacious sinners and all the perpetrators of wickedness shall be stubble, etc.", and it says (Malachi 3:20), "But for you who fear My Name, the sun of righteousness shall rise, etc."

וְכֹאשֶׁר יִתֵּן הַחוּטָא אֶל לְבוֹ הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה, רָאוּי לוֹ לְקַבֵּל עָלָיו שְׁלֵא יִשְׁנָה אֶל חֲטָאוֹ.

And when the sinner takes this matter to heart, it is proper for him to resolve not to repeat his sin.

וְהַשְׁנִי: שִׁיתֵּן אֶל לְבוֹ בּוֹא יוֹם הַמִּיתָה, וּבוֹרְאוֹ קָצוֹף עָלָיו עַל מָה שֶׁקָּדַם לוֹ מִן הַקְּצוֹר בְּחוּבוֹתָיו, כַּמּוֹ"ש (שם) "וַיִּמְיָ מִכְּלָכֶל אֶת יוֹם בּוֹאוֹ".

The second is that he should take to heart the coming of the day of death, when his Creator will be furious with him for his past shortcomings in his obligations, as it is written (Malachi 3:2), "But who can endure the day of His coming?"

וְכֹאשֶׁר יִשְׁיב זֶה אֶל לְבוֹ, חַיֵּב לִירֵא מַעֲנָשׁוֹ וּלְהַסְפִּים עִם נַפְשׁוֹ שְׁלֵא יִשְׁנָה אֶל מָה שֶׁיִּקְצֹף אֲדוֹנָיו עָלָיו.

And when he takes this to heart, he is obligated to fear His punishment and to agree with his soul not to repeat that which his Master will be angry about.

וְהַשְׁלִישִׁי: שִׁיתֵּן אֶל לְבוֹ הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר נָטָה בָּהֶם מֵאַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהָיו וְלֹא הִשְׁגִּיחַ לְעִבּוּדָתוֹ עִם הַתְּמִדָּה טוֹבוֹתָיו עָלָיו בָּהֶם, כַּמּוֹ"ש (ירמיהו ב':כ') "כִּי מַעֲוָלָם שִׁבְרָתִי עָלָיָה נִתְקַתִּי מוֹסְרִיתָיָה וְנִתְאַמְרִי לֹא אֶעֱבֹר".

The third is that he should take to heart the days in which he strayed from his Elokim and did not pay attention to His service, despite the continuous flow of His goodness upon him during those times, as it is written (Yirmiya 2:20), "For from of old I have broken your yoke, I have burst your bonds, and you said, 'I will not transgress.'"

וּפְרוּשׁ "לֹא אֶעֱבֹר" – לֹא אֶקְבֵּל עֲבוּדָתָיָה וְלֹא אֲבֹא בְּבְרִיתָיָה, כְּאֵלוֹ אָמַר: לֹא אֶעֱבֹר בְּבְרִיתָיָה, מַעֲנִין (דברים כט) "לְעִבְרָה בְּבְרִית ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ".

And the explanation of "I will not transgress" is: I will not accept Your service and I will not enter into Your covenant, as if it said: I will not pass into Your covenant, from the context of (Devarim 29:11), "to enter into the covenant of Hashem your G-d."

NOTE The phrase 'לֹא אֶעֱבֹר' can mean 'I will not pass over' or 'I will not transgress.' Here, the author explains it in the sense of not entering into or accepting the covenant, drawing a parallel to a similar phrase in Devarim.

וְהִרְבִּיעִי: שְׁשִׁיב הַגְּזֻלוֹת וּמִנֵּעַ מִן הָעֲבֵרוֹת וְיִרְף מִהֲזִקָּת כָּל הַבְּרוּאִים, כְּמוֹ שְׁכָתוּב (יחזקאל לג) "חֲבֹל יָשִׁיב רָשָׁע גְּזֻלָּה יִשְׁלֹם", וְאָמַר (איוב יא) "אִם אֶזְנִי בִידְדֵי הַרְחִיקָהּ וְגוֹי כִּי אֶזְתָּא פָּנֶיהָ מִמוֹם".

The fourth is that he should return stolen items, refrain from sins, and cease harming all creatures, as it is written (Yechezkel 33:15), "If the wicked returns the pledge, pays back what he stole," and it says (Iyov 11:14-15), "If iniquity is in your hand, remove it, etc., for then you will lift up your face without blemish."

וְהַחֲמִישִׁי: שְׁיִתֵּן אֶל לְבוֹ גְּדֻלַּת הַבּוֹרָא יִתְעַלֶּה אֲשֶׁר הִמְרָה דְּבָרוֹ וַיֵּצֵא מִקֶּשֶׁר עֲבוּדָתוֹ וּמִסִּרְתָּ תּוֹרָתוֹ, וְיִזְכִּיחַ אֶת נַפְשׁוֹ וַיְכַלִּימָנָה עַל זֶה, כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר (דברים לב) "הֲלֵה' תִּגְמְלוּ זֹאת", וְאָמַר (ירמיהו ה':כ"ב) "הֲאוֹתִי לֹא תִירָאוּ נָאם הִי".

The fifth is that he should take to heart the greatness of the exalted Creator, Whose word he defied and from Whose bond of service and tradition of His Torah he departed, and he should rebuke his soul and shame it for this, as it is stated (Devarim 32:6), "Do you thus requite Hashem?" and it says (Yirmiya 5:22), "Do you not fear Me? says Hashem."

וּבִזֶּה יִשְׁלְמוּ גְדָרֵי הַתְּשׁוּבָה אֲשֶׁר הִקְדַּמְנוּ.

And with this, the components of teshuvah that we have presented will be complete.

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

The chapter systematically details twenty conditions for complete teshuvah, divided into five conditions for each of its four main components. For regret, the conditions include fearing Hashem's punishment, being brokenhearted, showing outward signs of remorse, expressing sorrow through tears, and rebuking one's soul. For renouncing sin, the conditions are abandoning all forbidden acts, abstaining from permitted things that might lead to sin (making fences), abandoning sin even when able to repeat it, doing so out of shame before Hashem (not people), and making a permanent resolution never to repeat the sin. For beseeching forgiveness, the conditions are confessing sins and recognizing their enormity, constantly recalling them, fasting and praying at night, continually pleading with Hashem for atonement, and warning others about similar sins. Finally, for resolving not to repeat transgressions, the first condition is to weigh fleeting worldly pleasure against eternal spiritual pleasure, and temporary pain against everlasting pain.

My dear friends, the Chovos HaLevavos lays out for us a profound path to teshuvah, breaking it down into twenty detailed conditions across four main areas. It's a lot to take in, but the core message is clear: teshuvah is not just a moment of regret, but a comprehensive process that touches every part of our being. It's about truly feeling the weight of our actions, turning away from them completely, begging Hashem for forgiveness, and making a firm commitment for the future.

One of the most powerful ideas here is the concept of *abandoning sin even when you have the ability and opportunity to repeat it, solely out of fear and shame before Hashem*. This isn't just about avoiding sin when it's difficult or when others are watching. It's about cultivating an inner world where our connection to Hashem is so real, so palpable, that the thought of displeasing Him, even in private, becomes unbearable. It's about building that deep, personal relationship where our choices are driven by our love and awe for Him, not by external pressures or fleeting desires.

Think about the example of the Chassidim who would refrain from seventy kinds of permitted things out of fear of stumbling into one forbidden thing. This isn't about being extreme; it's about recognizing the slippery slope, the subtle ways the yetzer hara tries to pull us down. It's about creating a buffer, a *seyag*, around our spiritual lives, so that we are always leaning towards kedusha, always protecting our neshama from even the slightest blemish.

So, what can we take home from this today? Let's focus on that inner resolve. When you face a choice, big or small, that could potentially lead you away from Hashem, pause for a moment. Ask yourself: Am I making this choice because I truly fear and love Hashem, or am I being swayed by something else? Strengthen your inner commitment to Him. Today, choose one area where you can build a small "fence" around yourself, a conscious decision to avoid something permissible that might lead to something less desirable, purely out of your love and awe for Hashem.