

חובות הלבבות • שער התשובה • פרק שביעי

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

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This chapter delves into the many obstacles and pitfalls that can hinder a person's path to complete teshuvah. We will explore how complacency in sin, delaying repentance, and returning to past transgressions can undermine one's efforts. The Chovos HaLevavos emphasizes the critical importance of immediate and comprehensive repentance, highlighting that even small sins become grave through persistence, while even large sins can be erased through sincere teshuvah.

The chapter also addresses the dangers of relying on future repentance, repenting only partially, and the profound awareness that Hashem sees all our hidden deeds. Through powerful mashalim and pesukim, we are guided to understand the true nature of sin and the transformative power of genuine teshuvah, urging us to act with urgency and completeness in our spiritual journey.

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

אבל מפסידי התשובה רבים מאד, וכבר זכרתי רבם במה שקדם מן השער הזה.

However, the things that hinder teshuvah are very numerous, and I have already mentioned most of them in what preceded in this very Shaar.

ומפסידיה עוד: ההסכם על העברה, והוא ההתמדה על עשותה, והאחור מהניח אותה, ולא תתכן תשובה על זה.

And among its hindrances further is: complacency regarding the sin, which means persisting in doing it, and delaying to abandon it; and teshuvah is not possible as long as this continues.

וכבר נאמר: אין קטנה בעברות עם ההתמדה, ולא גדולה בהם עם בקשת המחילה.

It has already been said: "No sin is small when done with persistence, and no sin is great when one seeks forgiveness for it."

והוא שההתמדה מורה על בזותו דבר האלהים, ושהוא מקל במצותו והזהרתו, ומזמן עצמו לענשו, ובו נאמר (במדבר טו): "והנפש אשר תעשה ביד רמה כי דבר ה' בזה."

This is because persistence indicates one's contempt for the word of Hashem, and that he takes His mitzvah and warning lightly, thereby inviting punishment upon himself; and concerning such a person, it is said (Bamidbar 15): "But the soul that acts with a high hand, because he has blasphemed the word of Hashem."

ועוד, כי ההתמדה על העברה, ואם היא קטנה, הולכת וגדלה בהתמדתו עליה.

Furthermore, persistence in a sin, even if it is a small one, continuously grows as one persists in it.

והגדולה, כשִׁמְבֹקֵשׁ בְּעָלֶיהָ מְחִילָה עָלֶיהָ וְעָזַב אוֹתָהּ לִירְאַת הָאֱלֹהִים, הוֹלֶכֶת הַלּוֹךְ וְחָסוּר וּמִתְמַעֲטֶטֶת עַד שֶׁתִּמָּחַה מִסֵּפֶר עֲוֹנוֹתָיו, וְיִנָּקָה מִמֶּנָּה בְּעָלֶיהָ בַּתְּשׁוּבָה.

However, a great sin, when its perpetrator seeks forgiveness for it and abandons it out of fear of Hashem, gradually diminishes and shrinks until it is completely erased from his book of sins, and its perpetrator is purified from it through teshuvah.

הֲלֹא תִרְאֶה הַחוּט שֶׁל מָשִׁי כָּמָה הוּא חֲזָק כְּשִׁיכָּפַל פַּעַמִּים רַבּוֹת, וּכְבָר יִדְעָתָּ כִּי עָקְרוּ מִחֲלוּשׁ שִׁבְדֵּיבָרִים, וְהוּא רִיר הַתּוֹלָעַת.

Do you not see how strong a silk thread becomes when it is doubled many times, even though you know its origin is from the weakest of materials, which is the saliva of the silkworm?

וְנִרְאֶה הַחֶבֶל הַגָּדוֹל שֶׁל סְפִינָה כְּשִׁמְשָׁמְשִׁין בּוֹ זְמַן אָרוֹךְ, הוֹלֶךְ הַלּוֹךְ וְחָסוּר עַד אֲשֶׁר יִפְתָּח וַיָּשׁוּב חֲלוּשׁ מְכַל חֲלוּשׁ.

And observe a large ship's rope: when it is used for a long time, it gradually wears away until it eventually breaks and becomes weaker than the weakest thing.

וּכְמוֹ כֵּן עֲנִין הַקִּטְנוֹת וְהַגְּדֻלוֹת בְּעֵבְרוֹת עִם הַהִתְמַדָּה וּבִקְשַׁת הַמְּחִילָה.

Similarly, this is the matter of the smallness and greatness of sins, regarding persistence and seeking forgiveness.

וְעַל כֵּן דִּמָּה אוֹתָם הַכָּתוּב בּוֹ כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (ישעיה ה): "הוֹי מַשְׁכִּי הָעוֹן בְּחֶבְלֵי הַשָּׁוְא."

Therefore, the verse compared them to a rope, as it is said (Yeshayah 5): "Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood."

וּכְבָר נֶאֱמַר: אַל תִּבְטֵא לְקִטְנוֹת מָה שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ, אֲךָ תִּבְטֵא לַגְּדֻלַּת מִי שֶׁחָטָאתָ לוֹ.

It has already been said: "Do not look at the smallness of what you have done, but rather look at the greatness of Him against Whom you have sinned."

וְאַל תִּשְׂמַח לְסִכְלוֹת בְּנֵי אָדָם בְּרַע מִצְּפוּנָה, וְרֹאיוֹ שֶׁתֵּאָכַל לִידִיעַת הַבוֹרָא בְּמָה שֶׁאָתָה צוּפִין, וְהַשְׁקָפָתוֹ עַל נִסְתָּרוֹתֶיהָ וְנִגְלוֹתֶיהָ, וְשֶׁהוּא זֹכֵר אוֹתָם לֶךְ יוֹתֵר מִמָּה שֶׁאָתָה זֹכֵר, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁאָתָה תִּשְׁכַּח וְהוּא לֹא יִשְׁכַּח, וְתִתְּעַלֵּם וְלֹא יִתְּעַלֵּם, כַּמּוֹ"שׁ (שם סה): "הִנֵּה כָּתוּבָה לְפָנַי", וְאָמַר (ירמיה יז): "חֲטָאת יְהוּדָה כָּתוּבָה."

Do not rejoice in people's ignorance of your hidden bad deeds; rather, it is proper for you to mourn because of the Creator's knowledge of what you conceal, and His observation of your hidden thoughts and revealed actions, and that He remembers them for you more than you remember them, because you will forget, but He will not forget, and you will ignore them, but He will not ignore them, as it is written (Yeshayah 65): "Behold, it is written before Me," and it says (Yirmiya 17): "The sin of Yehudah is written."

וּמִמְפָּסִידֶיהָ עוֹד: הַחֲזָרָה אֶל הָעֵבֶרָה אַחֵר הַשְׁלֵמַת תְּנָאֵי הַתְּשׁוּבָה מִמֶּנָּה, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר (שם לד) בְּפִרְשֵׁת: "הִדְבָּר אֲשֶׁר הָיָה אֶל יִרְמְיָהוּ לְשַׁלַּח אִישׁ אֶת עַבְדּוֹ", וְשֶׁאֵר הָעֲנִין הַהוּא.

Another hindrance is: returning to the sin after completing all the conditions of teshuvah from it, as it says (Yirmiyahu 34) in the passage: "The word that came to Yirmiyahu... to let every man his manservant go free," and the rest of that matter.

וממפסדיה גם כן: מי שיבטיח את נפשו לשוב באחרית ימיו, וחושב שיתרחק מן העברות לאחר שגיע
אל רצונו וישלים תאוותו מהם, והוא כמרמה את אלהיו.

Also among its hindrances is: one who assures himself that he will do teshuvah in his later years, and thinks he will distance himself from sins after he has achieved his desires and satisfied his cravings from them; such a person is like one who tries to deceive Hashem.

ובו אמרו רז"ל: "האומר אחטא ואשוב, אין מספיקין בידו לעשות תשובה."

Concerning him, our Sages, of blessed memory, said: "One who says, 'I will sin and then repent, I will sin and then repent,' is not given the opportunity to do teshuvah."

ובתוכחה אשר כתבתי בסוף זה הספר: נפשי, הכיני צדה לרוב, אל תמעיתי, בעוד בחיים חיתך ויש לאל
ידה, כי רב ממך הדרך.

And in the rebuke that I wrote at the end of this book: "My soul, prepare abundant provisions, do not be scant, while your life is still within you and you have the ability, for the journey before you is exceedingly long."

ואל תאמרי מחר אקח צדה, כי פנה היום, כי לא תדעי מה ילד יום.

And do not say, 'Tomorrow I will take provisions,' for the day is turning, and you do not know what a day may bring forth.

ודעי כי תמול לעד לא ישוב, וכל אשר פעלת בו שקול וספור וחשוב.

And know that yesterday will never return, and all that you did in it is weighed, counted, and accounted for.

ואל תאמרי מחר אעשה, כי יום המות מכל חי מכסה.

And do not say, 'Tomorrow I will do my duty,' for the day of death is hidden from every living creature.

מהרי עשות בכל יום חקו, כי בכל יום המות ישלח חצו ובקרו.

Hasten to do each day's portion, for every day death sends its arrow and lightning.

ואל תתמהמהי מעשות חק דבר יום ביומו, כי כצפור נודדת מן קנה, כן איש נודד ממקומו.

And do not delay in doing the duty of each day in its day, for just as a bird is driven from its nest, so too a man is driven from his place.

וממפסדי התשובה גם כן: שיהא השב שב מקצת עונותיו ומתמיד על קצתם, כמו שיצא מן העברות
שפינו ובין המקום וישוב מהם, ולא יצא ממה שיש בינו ובין בני אדם מגזל ואונאה וגנבה והדומה לזה.

Another hindrance to teshuvah is also: that the penitent repents from some of his sins but persists in others, for example, he stops from sins between man and Hashem and repents for them, but does not stop from what is between himself and other people, such as robbery, overcharging, theft, or similar things.

ובזה נאמר (איוב יא): "אם און בקידך הרחיקהו."

And concerning this, it is said (Iyov 11): "If iniquity is in your hand, distance it far away."

וְאָמְרוּ רַז"ל בְּעֵינֵי הָהוּא: "אָדָם שֵׁיִשׁ בְּיָדוֹ עֲבָרָה וּמִתְוַדֶּה וְאֵינוֹ חוֹזֵר בּוֹ, לָמָּה הוּא דוֹמָה? לָמָּה שְׂתוּפֶס שְׂרִיץ בְּיָדוֹ, אֲפֹלוֹ טוֹבֵל בְּכָל מִימּוֹת שְׁבַע עוֹלָם לֹא עֲלָתָה לוֹ טְבִילָה; וְרָקוּ מִיָּדוֹ, עֲלָתָה לוֹ טְבִילָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (מִשְׁלֵי כ"ח:י"ג): 'וּמוֹדָה וְעוֹזֵב יִרְחָם.'"

And our Sages, of blessed memory, said concerning this matter: "A person who has a sin in his hand and confesses it but does not abandon it, to what is he comparable? To one who holds an unclean reptile in his hand; even if he immerses in all the waters of the world, his immersion is of no avail to him. If he throws it away from his hand, then as soon as he immerses, his immersion immediately becomes effective, as it is said (Mishlei 28:13): 'And one who confesses and abandons them shall obtain mercy.'"

NOTE The analogy of holding an unclean reptile (sheretz) illustrates that merely confessing a sin is insufficient; one must actively abandon the sin itself for teshuvah to be complete and effective, just as one must release the physical impurity for the ritual immersion to purify.

וּמָה שֶׁהִקְדַּמְנוּ מִמִּפְסְדֵי הַשְּׁעָרִים אֲשֶׁר קִדְמוּ בַּסֵּפֶר הַזֶּה, כֻּלָּם גַּם כֵּן מִפְסְדִים הִתְשׁוּבָה, וְאֵינֶנִּי צָרִיךְ לַשְׁנוֹתָם בַּשַּׁעַר הַזֶּה.

And what we have already mentioned regarding the hindrances in the previous gates of this book, all of them also hinder teshuvah, and I do not need to repeat them in this gate.

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

Shaar HaTeshuvah, Chapter Seven, outlines several significant factors detrimental to repentance. The first is complacency and persistence in sin, which reflects a disregard for Hashem's commands and prevents true teshuvah. The author illustrates how persistent small sins grow in severity, while sincere repentance can diminish even large sins. A second pitfall is returning to a sin after having repented from it. A third is delaying repentance, with the mistaken belief that one can sin now and repent later, which the Sages teach prevents one from doing teshuvah. Finally, the chapter warns against partial repentance, where one abandons some sins but continues others, emphasizing that teshuvah must be complete and encompass all transgressions, both between man and Hashem and between man and his fellow.

My dear friend, the Chovos HaLevavos gives us a powerful, almost frightening, insight today: there's no such thing as a 'small sin' if you keep doing it. We often tell ourselves, "It's just a little thing, Hashem understands." But the Rebbe here teaches us that *persistence* in even a minor transgression shows a disregard for Hashem's word, a lightness in our approach to His mitzvot. It's like a tiny thread that, when doubled over and over, becomes an unbreakable rope. Each time we repeat a 'small' sin, we're not just doing it again; we're strengthening its hold on us, and weakening our connection to Hashem. It's not the size of the sin, but the *attitude* of continuing it, that makes it so dangerous.

On the flip side, the Rebbe offers incredible chizuk: even a *big* sin, when truly repented for with a sincere desire to abandon it out of yiras Shamayim, begins to shrink and diminish until it's completely erased. Just like a mighty ship's rope, with constant use and wear, eventually frays and breaks, so too does a grave sin lose its power when we genuinely turn away from it. This teaches us that Hashem is always waiting for us, always ready to forgive, no matter how far we've strayed, as long as we make that real effort to change.

This also means we can't pick and choose which sins to repent for. We can't say, "I'll fix things between me and Hashem, but I'll keep holding onto that resentment or that bit of stolen money." The mashal of holding a sheretz while immersing in a mikvah is so vivid: the immersion is useless until you let go of the impurity. Teshuvah has to be wholehearted, a complete turning away from *all* that separates us from Hashem and from our fellow Yid.

So, what's our takeaway for today? Don't let any 'small' sin become a habit. If there's something you've been doing repeatedly, even if it feels minor, make a conscious effort *today* to stop it. And if there's a bigger sin you're struggling with, remember that true teshuvah, with a commitment to abandon it, can make it disappear completely. Don't delay, because we don't know what tomorrow brings.