

חובות הלבבות • שער התשובה • פרק תשיעי

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

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This chapter of Shaar HaTeshuvah delves into the profound question of whether repentance is effective for all sins. We will explore the two main categories of sins: those solely between man and Hashem, and those involving both man and his fellow. The chapter outlines the path to teshuvah for sins against Hashem, emphasizing that it is possible throughout one's lifetime, provided there is sincere intent to turn away from the transgression and cleanse the soul.

However, the chapter then presents a detailed discussion on the significant challenges in repenting for sins committed against another person. It enumerates various scenarios where full rectification becomes exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, due to factors such as the inability to locate the wronged party, financial constraints, the victim's unwillingness to forgive, or the sheer magnitude and complexity of the transgression. This section highlights the gravity of interpersonal sins and the intricate steps required for their atonement.

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

אבל אם תתכן התשובה מכל חטא אם לא, אומר בתשובת השאלה הזאת כי העונות שני מינים.

Regarding whether teshuvah is possible for every sin or not, I will answer this question by stating that there are two categories of aveiros.

אחד מהם עונות שבין אדם למקום בלבד ככחש באלהים והמחשבות הרעות והמצפונים הרעים ולאין שבחובות הלבבות והרבה מחובות האברים אשר לא יחמס החוטא בהם כי אם נפשו בלבד ואין אשמה עליו אלא להמרותו מצות אלהיו.

One category is aveiros solely between a person and Hashem, such as denying Hashem, evil thoughts, bad inner intentions, negative mitzvos of the heart, and many mitzvos of the limbs where the sinner harms only his own soul, and his only guilt is in rebelling against the command of his G-d.

והמין השני עונות שבין אדם לחברו והם שיש בהם ענין מעניני הרעה והחמס לבני אדם אם בגופם אם בממונם או בזכרם ומקבץ החוטא חמסו בנפשו בהמרותו את אלהיו עם חמסו ב"א.

The second category is aveiros between a person and his fellow, which involve matters of harm and oppression towards other people, whether to their bodies, their money, or their reputation; in these, the sinner combines the oppression of his own soul by rebelling against Hashem with the oppression of other people.

ומה שיהיה מן העונות והחטאים בין האדם לאלהיו בלבד תתכן לו התשובה מהם בעודנו בחיים כשיתעורר לקצורו וישתדל לשוב מעונו אצל בוראו.

For aveiros and sins that are solely between a person and Hashem, teshuvah is possible for him throughout his lifetime, whenever he awakens to his shortcomings and strives to turn away from his sin to his Creator.

ומן הדין עליו שתהיה התשובה מן העון במין שחטא בו אם יוכל שאם יהיה החטא בחובות הלכות כלל הרע והמחשבה הרעה והנטייה והקנאה והשנאה והדומה לזה, התשובה ממנו ראויה להיות בהטבת הלב ואהבת הטוב לבני אדם והמחילה להם.

It is proper for his teshuvah from the sin to be in the same category in which he sinned, if possible; for example, if the sin was in the duties of the heart, such as a bad heart, evil thoughts, bearing a grudge, jealousy, hatred, or similar things, the appropriate teshuvah for this is to cultivate a good heart, love of doing good to others, and forgiving them.

ואם יהיה החטא באבר מאברי הגוף באכילת מה שאסר הבורא אכילתו והבעילות שהזהיר מהן וחלול שבתות ומועדים ושבועות שקר ראוי שתהיה תשובתו ממנו באותו ענין ובאותו מין שהיה חוטא בו עם שתוף הלב בכונה לאלהים.

And if the sin was with a limb of the body, such as eating what the Creator forbade, forbidden relations, desecrating Shabbos and Yomim Tovim, or false oaths, it is proper for his teshuvah to be in that specific matter and in that category in which he sinned, along with the heart's intention towards Hashem.

וכל הענין הזה יתכן לאדם בחייו בעוד שהוא מאריך ימים עם ברור כוונתו כשהוא מכוון לתשובה ולטהר נפשו מעונו אצל בוראו ובכמוהו אמר החכם (משלי ט) אם חכמת חכמת לך.

All this is possible for a person during his lifetime, as long as he lives long enough, with a clear intention when he aims for teshuvah and to purify his soul from its sin before his Creator; concerning such a penitent, the wise man said (Mishlei 9:12), 'If you are wise, you are wise for yourself.'

אבל מה שהיה מן העונות לאלהים ולבני אדם יקשה על האדם התשובה מהם לכמה פנים.

However, for aveiros that are both against Hashem and against other people, teshuvah is difficult for a person for several reasons.

מהם שלא ימצא העשוק או שימות או שמקומו רחוק.

One reason is that he may not find the person he wronged, or that person may have died, or their location may be far away.

ומהם שיאבד הממון מד העושק ואין לאל ידו להשיב העשק לבעליו.

Another is that the money may have been lost from the oppressor's possession, and he is unable to return the stolen item to its owner.

ומהם שהעשוק שמא לא ימחל לעושק במה שעשקו מהזקו בגופו וספרו בגנותו.

Furthermore, the wronged person may not forgive the oppressor for the harm he inflicted upon his body or for speaking badly about him.

ומהם שלא יכיר העושק את העשוק או שלא ידע סך הממון אשר עשק כמו שעשק אנשי קריה או אנשי מדינה ולא הכיר אותם ולא נתברר אצלו מספר הממון שלקח מהם בעל ובחמס.

Another difficulty is that the oppressor may not know the person he wronged, or he may not know the amount of money he stole, such as when he oppressed the people of a city or a province and did not recognize them, nor was the amount of money he took from them wrongfully and by force clear to him.

ומהם שנטבע המזון האסור בכפּליו מן המתר ואינו קל להוציא אותו ממנו אלא בהפסד הרבה חלקים מן המתר כמ"ש רבותינו ז"ל גזל מריש ובנאו בבירה בית שמאי אומרים מקעקע כל הבירה כלה ומחזיר מריש לבעליו ובית הלל אומרים אין לו אלא דמי מריש בלבד מפני תקנת השבים.

Still another is when forbidden money has become mixed with many times its amount of permitted money, and it is not easy to extract it without incurring a loss of many parts of the permitted money, as our Rabbis, of blessed memory, said: 'If one stole a beam and built it into a palace, Beis Shammai say: 'He must dismantle the entire palace and return the beam to its owner.' Beis Hillel say: 'He only needs to return the value of the beam, due to the enactment for penitents.'

וממה שתקשה עוד התשובה ממנו מה שנהג בו האדם עד ששב לו המעשה הרע דבק כהדבק המעשים הטבעיים אשר לא יקל להניחם כמו שכתוב (ירמיהו ט:ד') למדו לשונם דבר שקר העוה נלאו ואמר (שם יג) הנהפך כושי עורו ונמר חברברתיו וגו'.

Another reason teshuvah becomes difficult is when a person has become so accustomed to a bad deed that it clings to him like natural actions, which are not easy to abandon, as it is written (Yirmiyahu 9:4), 'They have taught their tongue to speak lies, they weary themselves to commit iniquity,' and it says (ibid. 13:23), 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?'

ומהם שפיכות דמים והריגת הנקיים בין בפגיעה בין בהליכת רכילות כמו שידעת מענן דואג בעיר הכהנים אשר גרם להרגם ברכילות תחלה ופגע בהם אחר כך כמו שנא' (שמואל א כ"ב:י"ח) ויסב דואג האדמי ויפגע הוא בכהנים.

Among these difficult cases are bloodshed and the killing of the innocent, whether by direct assault or by slander, as you know from the matter of Doeg in the city of Kohanim, who first caused them to be killed through his slander and then attacked them himself, as it is stated (Shmuel I 22:18), 'Then Doeg the Edomite turned and attacked the Kohanim.'

ומהם עוד מי שגורם לאבד מזון חברו ברכילותו אין עולה לו תשובה עד שירצה את חברו אם במזון אם בפיוס ובכניעה למחל לו ולנשא חטאו כמו שכתוב (מיכה ג:ג') ואשר אכלו שאר עמי ועורם מעליהם הפשיטו.

Furthermore, for one who causes his fellow to lose money through his slander, his teshuvah is not effective until he appeases his fellow, whether with money or with entreaty and humility, to forgive him and bear his sin, as it is written (Micha 3:3), 'And those who ate the flesh of My people and stripped their skin from them.'

ומהם מי שבא אל הערוה והוליד ממנה ממזר כי החרפה לא תמוש והשבת המעות אי אפשר לו כמו שאמר (איוב לא) כי היא זמה והוא עון פלילים כי אש היא עד אבדון תאכל ואמר הכתוב (הושע ה) בה' בגדו כי בנים זרים ילדו.

Another is one who engaged in forbidden relations and fathered a mamzer from it, for the disgrace will never depart, and the wrong cannot be rectified, as it says (Iyov 31:11), 'For that is lewdness, and it is an iniquity to be punished by the judges; for it is a fire, it consumes to destruction,' and the verse says (Hoshea 5:7), 'They betrayed Hashem, for they begot strange children.'

ומהם מי שהרגיל לשונו לכזב ולספר בגנות בני אדם ולדבר בהם ואיננו יכול לעמד על זה מרבו מפני שאין לו תכלית אצלו וכבר שכח האנשים אשר דבר בהם והכל שמור עליו וכתוב בספר עונותיו ובו נאמר (תהלים מא) ואם בא לראות שוא ידבר לבו יקבץ און לו ואמר (שם נ) אם ראית גנב ותרא עמו ושאר הענין. והנה השוה הלשון הרע עם הגנבה והנאוף ואמר (ירמיהו ט:ד') ואיש פרעהו יתלול.

Another is one who accustomed his tongue to lie and to speak disparagingly of people and to talk about them, and he cannot keep track of it due to its abundance, because it has no end for him, and he has already forgotten the people he spoke about; yet everything is preserved against him and written in the book of his sins, and concerning him it is said (Tehillim 41:7), 'And if he comes to see me, he speaks vanity; his heart gathers iniquity to itself; when he goes abroad, he tells it,' and it says (ibid. 50:18), 'When you saw a thief, you were pleased with him,' and the rest of the matter. Behold, the verse equated lashon hara with theft and adultery, and it says (Yirmiyahu 9:4), 'And a man will deceive his fellow.'

וממה שתקשה התשובה ממנו מי שהדיח בני אדם בדת שבדה להם והכריחם להאמין בה ותעה והתעה וכל אשר יוסיף העם המאמינים בה יוסיף עונו ויכפל כמו שארז"ל כל המזכה את הרבים אין חטא בא על ידו וכל המחטיא את הרבים אין מספיקין בידו לעשות תשובה ואמרו ירבועם חטא והחטיא את הרבים חטא הרבים תלוי בו שנאמר (מלכים א טו) על חטאת ירבועם אשר חטא ואשר החטיא וגו'.

And among those for whom teshuvah is difficult is one who led people astray with a religion he invented for them and compelled them to believe in it; he erred and caused others to err, and the more people who believe in it, the more his sin will increase and be multiplied, as our Sages, of blessed memory, said: 'Whoever brings merit to the many, no sin comes through him; but whoever causes the many to sin, he is not given the opportunity to do teshuvah.' And they said: 'Yeravam sinned and caused the many to sin, and so the sin of the many is attributed to him, as it is stated (Melachim I 15:30), 'Because of the sins of Yeravam that he committed and that he caused Yisrael to commit, etc.'

ומשיג במין הזה מי שאפשר לו לצוות בטוב ולהזהיר מן הרע לאנשים תועים ועכבו מזה חול ממוןם או ראותם או בשתו מהוכיח אותם ותעו ולא הורה אותם הדרה הישרה כמ"ש (יחזקאל לג) הוא רשע בעונו זמות ודמו מידך אבקש:

Included in this category is one who is able to command good and warn against evil for erring people, but was prevented from doing so by hoping for their money, or fearing them, or being ashamed to rebuke them, and they went astray because he did not teach them the straight path, as it is written (Yechezkel 33:8), 'That wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require from your hand.'

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

Shaar HaTeshuvah Chapter Nine begins by categorizing sins into two types: those between man and Hashem, and those between man and his fellow. For sins against Hashem, the chapter explains that repentance is always possible during one's lifetime, provided there is sincere intent, and that the form of repentance should ideally correspond to the nature of the sin. It then transitions to the complexities of repenting for sins against one's fellow, detailing eleven specific reasons why such teshuvah can be extremely difficult. These reasons include the inability to find the wronged party, financial inability to make restitution, the victim's refusal to forgive, not knowing the extent of the damage, the mixing of stolen funds, the entrenchment of bad habits, the irreversible nature of bloodshed or causing a mamzer, the widespread damage of slander, and the profound difficulty of repenting for leading others astray into false beliefs.

My dear friend, the Chovos HaLevavos today lays out a profound truth about teshuvah: there are two kinds of sins. Those between us and Hashem, where teshuvah is always possible as long as we live, and those between us and another person, which are far, far more difficult to rectify. Why? Because with Hashem, He is always ready to forgive when we truly turn to Him. But with another person, we need their forgiveness, their willingness to accept our amends, and sometimes, the damage is simply irreversible.

This isn't just a theoretical distinction; it's a call to action. We often think of teshuvah as a process for Yom Kippur, or for big, obvious sins. But the Chovos HaLevavos is teaching us that the most challenging teshuvah is often for the seemingly 'smaller' things we do to others – a harsh word, a moment of jealousy, a slight to someone's honor. These are the things that can become deeply ingrained habits, like the Ethiopian's skin or the leopard's spots, as the Navi says. And because they involve another person, the path to full teshuvah is fraught with obstacles.

So what does this mean for our daily avodah? It means we must be incredibly vigilant in our interactions with others. Before we speak, before we act, we need to pause and consider: will this cause pain? Will this diminish someone? Because if it does, the path back to a clean slate is not just between us and Hashem, but between us and another soul, and that is a much harder journey. It's a powerful reminder that bein adam l'chaveiro is not just a category of mitzvos; it's a category of teshuvah that demands our utmost care and prevention.

Today, let's commit to being extra mindful of our words and actions towards others, knowing that preventing a sin bein adam l'chaveiro is infinitely easier than trying to fix it later.