

הלכות תשובה • פרק ראשון

Learned like the daf, the literal words in bold, flowing with the elucidation

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this opening perek of Hilchos Teshuvah, the Rambam introduces us to the beautiful and essential mitzvah of Teshuvah, showing us how Hashem in His infinite mercy always leaves the door open for us to return to Him. We will learn that the very heart of this mitzvah is Vidui—verbal confession—which is required for any sin we commit, whether it was done on purpose or by accident, and even when bringing a korban or receiving a court-imposed punishment.

The perek also guides us through the different ways Hashem grants us atonement, from the special avodah of the Se'ir HaMishtaleach (the scapegoat) on Yom Kippur during the times of the Beis HaMikdash, to the power of Teshuvah in our own times when we no longer have the Mizbe'ach. We will see how the process of cleansing our neshama depends on the severity of the transgression, showing us the path to complete forgiveness.

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

הלכה א

Halacha 1 • The Positive Commandment of Verbal Confession as Part of Repentance

כָּל מִצְוֹת שֶׁבְּתוֹרָה בֵּין עֲשֶׂה בֵּין לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה

Regarding all mitzvot of the Torah, whether a positive command or a negative command,

אִם עָבַר אָדָם עַל אַחַת מֵהֶן בְּזָדוֹן בִּין בְּשִׁגְגָה

if a person transgresses one of them, whether willfully or inadvertently,

כְּשִׁיעָשָׂה תְּשׁוּבָה וַיָּשׁוּב מִחֲטָאוֹ

when he performs repentance and returns from his sin,

חַיֵּב לְהִתְנַדֵּוֹת לִפְנֵי הָאֵל בְּרוּךְ הוּא

he is obligated to confess before God, blessed is He,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "אִישׁ אוֹ אִשָּׁה כִּי יַעֲשׂוּ" וְגו' "וְהִתְנַדְּוּ אֶת חַטֹּאתֵם אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ"

as it is said in the Torah, "a man or a woman when they commit" etc. "and they shall confess their sin which they committed."

זֶה וְדוּי דְּבָרִים.

This refers to a confession of words.

וְדוּי זֶה מִצְוַת עֲשֶׂה.

And this confession is a positive mitzvah.

כיצד מתוודין.

How does one confess?

אומר אָנָּה הַשֵּׁם חָטֵאתִי עָוִיתִי פָּשַׁעְתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ וְעָשִׂיתִי כָךְ וְכָךְ

The sinner says: "I implore You, Hashem, I sinned, I transgressed, I rebelled before You, and I did such and such,

וְהִרֵי נַחֲמָתִי וּבִשְׁתִּי בְּמַעֲשֵׂי וּלְעוֹלָם אֵינִי חוֹזֵר לְדָבָר זֶה."

and behold, I regret and am embarrassed by my deeds, and forever I will not return to this thing."

וְזֶהוּ עֲקָרוֹ שֶׁל וְדוּי.

And this is the essence of confession.

וְכָל הַמְרַבֵּה לְהַתְוֹדוֹת וּמְאֲרִיךְ בְּעֲנָנָיו זֶה הֵרִי זֶה מְשַׁבַּח.

And whoever increases to confess and elaborates on this matter, behold, this is praiseworthy.

וְכֵן בְּעֲלֵי חֲטָאוֹת וְאַשְׁמוֹת בְּעֵת שֶׁמְבִיאִין קִרְבָּנוֹתֵיהֶן עַל שְׁגָגָתָן אוֹ עַל זְדוּנָן

And likewise, those obligated in sin offerings and guilt offerings, at the time that they bring their sacrifices for their inadvertent transgression or for their willful transgression,

אֵין מִתְכַּפֵּר לָהֶן בְּקִרְבָּנָם עַד שֶׁיַּעֲשׂוּ תְּשׁוּבָה וְיִתְוֹדוּ וְדוּי דְּבָרִים

do not attain atonement for themselves with their sacrifice until they perform repentance and confess a confession of words,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וְהִתְוֹדָה אֲשֶׁר חָטָא עָלֶיהָ".

as it is said, "and he shall confess that he sinned upon it."

וְכֵן כָּל מְחֻיְבֵי מִיתוֹת בֵּית דִּין וּמְחֻיְבֵי מִלְּקוֹת

And likewise, all those liable to deaths of Beis Din and those liable to lashes

אֵין מִתְכַּפֵּר לָהֶן בְּמִיתָתָן אוֹ בְּלִקְוָתָן עַד שֶׁיַּעֲשׂוּ תְּשׁוּבָה וְיִתְוֹדוּ.

do not attain atonement for themselves through their death or through their lashes until they perform repentance and confess.

וְכֵן הַחוֹבֵל בַּחֲבֵירוֹ וְהַמְזִיק מִמוֹנֵו

And likewise, one who injures his fellow and one who damages his property,

אֲףִי עַל פִּי שֶׁשָּׁלַם לוֹ מֵה שֶׁהוּא חַיֵּב לוֹ אֵינוֹ מִתְכַּפֵּר

even though he paid him what he is obligated to him, he does not attain atonement

עַד שֶׁיִּתְוֹדָה וְיָשׁוּב מַלְעָשׂוֹת כְּזֶה לְעוֹלָם

until he confesses and returns from doing like this ever,

שנאמר "מכל חטאת האדם".

as it is said, "from all sins of man."

הלכה ב

Halacha 2 · Atonement of the Scapegoat and the Distinction Between Light and Severe Transgressions

שעיר המשתלח לפי שהוא כפרה על כל ישראל

Regarding the goat that is sent to Azazel on Yom Kippur, since it is an atonement for all of Yisrael,

כהן גדול מתודה עליו על לשון כל ישראל

the Kohen Gadol confesses upon it on the tongue of all of Yisrael,

שנאמר ויקרא טז כא "והתודה עליו את כל עונת בני ישראל".

as it is said in the Torah in Vayikra 16:21, "And he shall confess upon it all of the iniquities of the children of Yisrael".

שעיר המשתלח מכפר על כל עבירות שבתורה, הקלות והחמורות,

The goat that is sent atones for all transgressions in the Torah, the light and the severe,

בין שעבר בזדון בין שעבר בשגגה,

whether that he transgressed intentionally, whether that he transgressed inadvertently,

בין שהודע לו בין שלא הודע לו,

whether that it became known to him, whether that not it became known to him,

הכל מתכפר בשעיר המשתלח.

everything is atoned for by the goat that is sent.

והוא שעשה תשובה.

And this is provided that he made teshuvah.

אבל אם לא עשה תשובה אין השעיר מכפר לו אלא על הקלות.

But if not he made teshuvah, does not the goat atone for him except for the light ones.

ומה הן הקלות ומה הן החמורות.

And what are the light ones, and what are the severe ones?

החמורות הן שחייבין עליהם מיתת בית דין או כרת.

The severe ones are those that one is liable for them death of the court of law or karet.

ושְׁבוּעַת שְׁוֹא וְשָׁקָר אֵף עַל פִּי שְׂאִין בָּהֶן כָּרַת הָרִי הֵן מִן הַחֲמוּרוֹת.

And an oath of vanity and falsehood, even though that there is not in them karet, behold they are among the severe ones.

ושְׁאָר מִצְוֹת לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה וּמִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה שְׂאִין בָּהֶן כָּרַת הֵם הַקִּלּוֹת:

And the rest of commandments of do not and commandments of do that there is not in them karet, they are the light ones.

הִלְכָּה ג

Halacha 3 · The Power of Teshuvah and Yom Kippur to Atone in the Absence of the Temple

בְּזֶמַן הַזֶּה שְׂאִין בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ קַיָּם

At this time, when the Beis HaMikdash is not standing,

וְאִין לָנוּ מִזְבֵּחַ כִּפָּרָה

and we do not have an altar of atonement to bring korbanos upon,

אִין שָׁם אֵלָּא תְּשׁוּבָה.

there is nothing there left to bring us forgiveness but teshuvah.

הַתְּשׁוּבָה מְכַפֶּרֶת עַל כָּל הַעֲבֵרוֹת.

And teshuvah atones for all transgressions.

אֲפִלּוּ רָשָׁע כָּל יָמָיו

Even if one was a wicked person all his days,

וַעֲשֵׂה תְּשׁוּבָה בְּאַחֲרֹנָה

and he did teshuvah at the very end of his life,

אִין מִזְכִּירִין לוֹ שׁוֹם דְּבַר מִרְשָׁעוֹ

we do not mention to him any thing from his wickedness anymore in Heaven,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר יִחְזָקֵאל לֵג יב "רָשַׁעַת הָרָשָׁע לֹא יִפְשֹׁל בָּהּ בְּיוֹם שׁוּבוֹ מִרְשָׁעוֹ".

as it is said by the Navi Yechezkel: "The wickedness of the wicked, he will not stumble in it on the day of his return from his wickedness."

וְעֶצְמוֹ שֶׁל יוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים מְכַפֵּר לְשָׁבִים

And the essence of Yom Kippur atones for those who return in teshuvah,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וִיקְרָא טַז ל "כִּי בְּיוֹם הַזֶּה יִכָּפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם":

as it is said in the Torah: "For on this day it will atone for you to cleanse you."

אף על פי שהתשובה מכפרת על הכל ועצמו של יום הכפורים מכפר.

Even though repentance atones for everything, and the essence of Yom Kippur atones for our sins,

יש עבירות שהן מתכפרים לשעתן

there are transgressions that are atoned for immediately upon doing teshuvah,

ויש עבירות שאין מתכפרים אלא לאחר זמן.

and there are transgressions that are not atoned for except after a passage of time.

כיצד.

How so?

עבר אדם על מצות עשה שאין בה כרת ועשה תשובה

If a person transgressed a positive commandment that does not carry the punishment of karet, and he did teshuvah,

אינו זז משם עד שמוחלין לו,

he does not move from there until they forgive him completely from Shamayim;

ובא לו נאמר ירמיה ג כב "שובו בנים שובבים ארפה משובתיכם" וגו'.

and regarding these it is said in the Navi, "Return, rebellious children, I will heal your rebelliousness" etc.

עבר על מצות לא תעשה שאין בה כרת ולא מיתת בית דין ועשה תשובה,

If he transgressed a negative commandment that does not carry karet and not death by the Beis Din, and he did teshuvah,

תשובה תולה ויום הכפורים מכפר,

the teshuvah suspends the punishment and Yom Kippur atones for it fully;

ובא לו נאמר ויקרא טז ל "כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם".

and regarding these it is said in the Torah, "For on this day it will atone for you."

עבר על פרתות ומיתות בית דין ועשה תשובה,

If he transgressed sins punishable by karet or death by the Beis Din, and he did teshuvah,

תשובה ויום הכפורים תולין ויסוריין הבאין עליו גומריין לו הכפרה.

the teshuvah and Yom Kippur suspend the judgment, and sufferings that come upon him complete the atonement for him.

ולעולם אין מתכפר לו כפרה גמורה עד שיבואו עליו יסורין,

And indeed, he is never atoned with a complete atonement until sufferings come upon him,

ובאלו נאמר תהילים פט לג "ופקדתי בשבט פשעם ובנגעים עונם".

and regarding these it is said in Tehillim, "And I will punish their transgression with a rod, and their iniquity with plagues."

במה דברים אמורים בשלא חלל את השם בשעה שעבר

In what case are these words said? When he did not desecrate the Name of Hashem at the time that he transgressed;

אבל המחלל את השם אף על פי שעשה תשובה והגיע יום הכפורים והוא עומד בתשובתו ובאו
עליו יסורין

but one who desecrates the Name, even though he did teshuvah, and Yom Kippur arrived, and he stands firm in his teshuvah, and sufferings came upon him,

אינו מתכפר לו כפרה גמורה עד שימות.

he is not atoned with a complete atonement until he dies.

אלא תשובה יום הכפורים ויסורין שלשתן תולין ומיתה מכפרת

Rather, teshuvah, Yom Kippur, and sufferings—the three of them suspend the punishment, and death atones completely,

שנאמר ישעיה כב יד "ונגלה באזני ה' צבאות וגו' אם יכפר העון הזה לכם עד תמותו":

as it is said, "And it was revealed in my ears by Hashem of Hosts... surely this iniquity shall not be atoned for you until you die."

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The Rambam begins by establishing that Vidui is a positive mitzvah of the Torah, outlining its essential text of regret, shame, and a firm commitment never to repeat the sin. He explains that sacrifices, court punishments, and even financial restitution do not bring atonement without sincere Teshuvah and Vidui. The chapter then details the unique power of the Se'ir HaMishtaleach on Yom Kippur to atone for various sins, and emphasizes that today, in the absence of the Beis HaMikdash, Teshuvah alone is what atones for all transgressions. Finally, the Rambam categorizes the four pathways of atonement, explaining how Teshuvah, Yom Kippur, suffering, and ultimately death work together to fully cleanse a person depending on the severity of the sin, culminating in the gravity of Chilul Hashem.

The central chiddush of this sugya is that teshuvah is never just a feeling in the heart; it requires "vidui devarim", the actual verbal confession of our mistakes before Hashem. The Rambam teaches us that even if a person brings a korban, pays back money they owe, or undergoes court-ordered punishment, their atonement is not complete until they physically speak the words of confession. There is a unique spiritual power in taking our vague feelings of regret and shaping them into clear, spoken words before Hashem.

When we keep our mistakes locked inside our minds, they remain blurry, and the yetzer hara can easily make us forget them or rationalize them away. By speaking them out loud in private prayer, we bring them into reality, which forces us to take true responsibility. The Torah gives us a simple, beautiful formula for this avodah: we state what we did, we express our sincere regret and embarrassment, and we resolve to do better. This verbal release is where the healing of the neshama truly begins.

Today, take two minutes to stand in a quiet corner alone with Hashem. Speak out loud, in your own words, one specific mistake you made recently, express your regret, and ask Hashem for the strength to do better next time.