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[Home](#) > Bilvavi Part 5 - 040 Talking with Hashem about Teshuvah

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## Bilvavi Part 5 - 040 Talking with Hashem about Teshuvah

בלבבי חלק ה. תשובה עמ' מ'-נ

### 1.

Rabbeinu Yonah<sup>[1]</sup> writes: “Know that anyone who sins in a happenstance manner, due to a strengthening of one’s passions and a loss of self-control, firstly, he has to regret what he did, and reflect with his heart on his sin...but if someone is always on an improper path, and his sins overtake him each day and he is always repeating his behavior, the first thing such a person must do is to leave his evil ways and thoughts.”

### 2.

In these words, Rabbeinu Yonah is telling us how to act in the superficial sense: don’t sin. But there is also an inner point contained in his words – let us explain.

There are some people whose deeds are connected with Hashem, and there are just some points in their life that are missing connection to Hashem. Their self-improvement is to work on those areas in their life that are missing connection to Hashem.

But there are some people, who even though they keep Torah and do all the mitzvos, they are still missing the inner meaning behind Torah and mitzvos. They don’t act upon love for Hashem and aren’t joyful as they should be; there is no feeling of any relationship to Hashem in their life; they do not feel that Hashem is our Father in Heaven, and that we can have a father-son relationship with Him. Such people are not living their lives properly at all. They are disconnected from the true meaning of life, from the purpose we are created for.

For such a person to improve, taking another *chrumra* (stringency) is not enough to be considered *Teshuvah*. He has to change his entire attitude toward life. He must leave the superficial kind of life he is living and connect with the One who created this world. If someone doesn’t feel a love for Hashem burning within him – if he doesn’t feel yearnings for his Father – this is a definite sign that the way he is living his life is totally wrong.

### 3.

This is a point which many people forget and are thus mistaken about.

When a person decides to do *Teshuvah*, and especially in Elul and *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, he thinks

into the way he is living his life and examines his deeds. He usually finds that he needs improvement in *shemiras halashon* (guarding his tongue from evil speech), *bittul Torah* (wasting Torah study time), he has to concentrate better in his davening and when he makes a *berachah*, etc.

What does he do? He takes on various resolutions in all of these things, so he can improve all these areas.

We can see that most of the time, these resolutions don't last for long. Even if they do last for a while, they do not produce a truly growing person.

Where is the root of the problem?

It's exactly what we started out saying. People are doing the first kind of *Teshuvah* that Rabbeinu Yonah mentioned, which is to avoid sins that come happenstance. But really, people often need the second kind of *Teshuvah* – they need to get back onto the proper, good path.

#### 4.

Let us elaborate.

The two kinds of *Teshuvah* which Rabbeinu Yonah mentions are totally different. One who sins only happenstance doesn't need to change his whole life; it is enough for him to accept upon himself that he will avoid those sins which he stumbles in. But if someone in general isn't living in the right way, he has to change his whole way of life, and after he gets back onto the right path in life, he can then fix up his sins.

If we reflect on our situation, our shortcomings which we find in ourselves do not have to do with the sin itself. It is really because we don't feel the inner meaning behind what a sin is. This is all because we aren't on the right path in general.

There is another reason why our resolutions often don't last. Chazal say that the evil inclination gets stronger each day, and if not for Hashem's help, a person cannot overpower it.<sup>[2]</sup> When does Hashem help a person? He only helps a person when the person is found with Him and lives with Him, connected to Him. Only then does Hashem help him.

We must understand that a person does not have the strength to keep his resolutions. It is way above what a human being can do. Only when a person is connected to Hashem in every time and situation can he be helped – at all times, and in every situation. The further away a person is from Hashem, the less help he gets from Hashem. When a person isn't connected to the inner meaning of life – Hashem – he will have no chance in keeping his resolutions.

#### 5.

There will definitely be people who will read these words and not understand it. They will react, "Are we far from Hashem?! We learn ten hours a day and do all the mitzvos properly. Aren't we attached to Hashem already from Torah and mitzvos? What else connects a person to Hashem other than Torah and mitzvos?!"

But if someone has this question, it shows how far he is from what it means to love Hashem, from the

inner meaning of life...from Hashem. They do not understand that there is a more inner world than the kind of world they are living in. They think that a Jew is only "Torah and mitzvos", and they aren't aware that their *chiyus* (vitality) in life is superficial. Such a question shows that they aren't really getting any life from the Torah and the mitzvos!

## 6.

What does it mean to get an inner kind of vitality? What does it mean to have connection with Hashem?

There are two layers to this.

The first layer of this is that a person has to recognize that he is living in Hashem's world, and that everything as we know it belongs to Hashem. For example, look at a pen. Think how it belongs to Hashem. He created it. Look at your hand too and realize that Hashem created it. Your soul, which is the life-force in you that makes your body work, was also made by Hashem, and it too belongs to Hashem.

This is just food for thought, but when you think about it, you can see that the entire universe is calling out the Creator. A person should reflect into this a lot, until he naturally develops an outlook at everything from this recognition - that he is only a creation of Hashem. This attitude has to envelope a person in every part of his life, 24/7.

## 7.

The second layer of this, which is higher than the first, is to realize the inner point of life - that Hashem is our Father, and we are His children. A person has to look at everything in life with this father-son relationship - a relationship that involves love and a desire for closeness. Just like a son wants to speak with his father and be with him, so should a person feel the same way towards Hashem. (Unfortunately, some people don't even feel closeness with their own fathers, and Hashem should have mercy on them, because they will not be helped by the words here). In whatever action a person does, he has to feel how "my Father" is asking me to do this.

In short, all of life is really the mitzvah of "honoring your Father" - our Father in Heaven. We need to view every situation of life like this. To live life on such a level is the whole depth of *Teshuvah*. (How we actually acquire this outlook on life is something else, which we will explain later.)

## 8.

*Teshuvah* means "to return." To where are we returning? To Hashem!

The main point of *Teshuvah* is not to leave sin, but rather because sin distances a person from closeness to Hashem, a person has to do *Teshuvah* so he can remove the barriers between him and Hashem, which got created from the sin. But even if a person manages to leave the sin, that still doesn't mean he has become close to Hashem. He might be avoiding every sin, but he still doesn't have a deep connection with Hashem.

A person has to create a deep, internal bond with Hashem, like a father-son relationship. That is the essence of *Teshuvah*. If a person just leaves his sins but he doesn't develop this bond, he is missing the whole point of *Teshuvah*.

This is written as well in the words of Rabbeinu Yonah: "His heart should understand that is it evil and bitter to abandon Hashem." That is the main part of *Teshuvah*!

## 9.

The Gemara states that if one does *Teshuvah* out of *yirah* (fear), his intentional sins do not get transformed into merits, but into unintentional sins; if he did *Teshuvah* out of *ahavah* (love of Hashem), then his intentional sins become transformed into merits.

Here we see that doing *Teshuvah* from fear of Hashem alone isn't enough to break the barrier that separates between one and the Creator; it doesn't erase the sin, and it merely becomes like an unintentional sin. It is only when a person does *Teshuvah* out of love for Hashem that his sin is erased and it becomes a merit for him. Only such *Teshuvah* removes the barriers between him and Hashem.

## 10.

What does it mean to do *Teshuvah* out of love for Hashem? It means like how a son loves his father.

The true *Teshuvah* is that a person leaves his sins because he wants to be close to his Father. The first thing a person must do is to realize that he is dealing with his Father, and that each sin distances him from his bond with his Father.

Many people struggle with this point. They do not feel how a sin distances one from having a bond with Hashem. They know about it intellectually, but they do not feel it.

The root of the problem is really that such people never even once felt a true connection with Hashem in their life. Thus they do not realize how a sin is so damaging to one's relationship with Hashem; they don't have the bond to begin with.

If a person is still at this level, he has to form a relationship with Hashem – before he begins to do *Teshuvah* on his sins. The way to do this will be explained soon.

## 11.

When a person comes to the clear recognition that sin ruins one's bond with Hashem, and he reflects into this, he can find different ways how this feeling gets expressed.

## 12.

We will open up our words here with a physical parable – how a father and son relate. Through this parable, we will learn about what it means for a Jew to have a relationship with his Father in heaven.

When a son rebels against his father, there are four factors that are included in his act of rebellion. 1) By rebelling, he has lost a loving connection with his father. 2) The son is ashamed in front of his father and can't look in his face, because of what he has done to him. 3) The son feels lowly inside that he has fallen so low and angered his father. 4) The son has pain, because he knows that his father is pained at his behaviors.

## 13.

The same goes for one's relationship with Hashem. When a Jew commits a sin, there are four parts to what he must now do.

1) He has to feel that he has weakened – and perhaps disconnected totally – his loving relationship with Hashem. This was explained before.

2) He is ashamed to look Hashem in the face. This is a little different than the parable of a father and

son, because by a regular father and son, the son is only ashamed when he's in front of his father. But in our relationship with Hashem, a person is constantly in front of Hashem, and Hashem always sees him; thus, a person has to always feel ashamed in front of Hashem. (This is a point which many people struggle with, because they do not constantly see Hashem. The first thing they must work on is to feel that Hashem sees them every second. Only after this can one feel a constant shame in front of Hashem).

This is mentioned explicitly by Rabbeinu Yonah, who writes: "The sixth part of *Teshuvah* is shame, as it is written, "*I am ashamed and humiliated, for I have borne the disgrace of my youth.*" A person is very ashamed to sin in front of people, because they will humiliate him for his sins. How can a person then not be ashamed from the Creator? It is only because Hashem is far from his understanding, and that is why he is afraid of humans, but not from Hashem."

#### 14.

3) A person has to feel lowly inside: How can I have been so brazen to disgrace Hashem and to rebel against His will?

This is also expressed by Rabbeinu Yonah, who writes, "One must have pain and think how evil it is to rebel against his Creator...that he did not remember his Creator who made him from nothing, and he forgot His kindnesses done to him...and how his heart could have the audacity to anger Him."

#### 15.

4) A person also needs to feel pain that Hashem also feels pain at His son who has distanced himself. This is really *tza'ar hashechinah* - the "pain of the *Shechinah*." It is already explained by Chazal and the *sefarim hakedoshim* about how a Jew must feel the pain of the *Shechinah*.

#### 16.

This last point itself has three parts to it as well:

1) Pain over the fact that his son has distanced himself from Him, and that Hashem misses His child, since He can't be with him due to the child's sins that have separated the bond.

2) Since Hashem created this universe in order to bestow good upon all of Creation, by sinning, Hashem has to punish him and He can't (so to speak) bestow the good He wanted to bestow. A father has great pain when he can't be good to his child.

3) It is written, "*Everything created in My Name was created in My honor.*" The purpose of creation is to reveal the glory of Hashem in the world, as explained in *sefer Daas Tevunos*. Thus, when a person sins and conceals the glory of Hashem from being revealed upon the world, the purpose of creation has been held back, and this causes great pain to the *Shechinah*.

#### 17.

Most people, upon reading the words up until now, will feel that these four levels are very far from us. Most people do not feel any of these four levels in their life, and some people feel a little bit of it in their life.

What is the root of the problem?

Rabbeinu Yonah has already answered it: "How can a person not be ashamed in front of Hashem? It is only because Hashem is far from his understanding." When a person doesn't feel ashamed in front of Hashem, it is really because he is far from Hashem to begin with. His Avodah is to begin a relationship with Hashem.

How can a person do it? Can it be done through Torah and mitzvos alone? We can all see that we have been learning Torah for many years and have been doing all the mitzvos, yet we are still far from Hashem!

The solution will soon be explained.

### **18.**

It is now upon us to figure out what is the proper way to doing real *Teshuvah* - how to feel that Hashem is our Father and we are His child. First, we need to think: what is what drives us to do *Teshuvah*?

Rabbeinu Yonah writes: "The level of *Teshuvah* depends on the amount of bitterness and pain that one expresses over his sins. This is repentance which comes from a purity of the soul and clean mind. Such pain comes from the purity of the Heavenly soul."

Here it is explained that the true *Teshuvah* one can do is only when one is being motivated by his soul. To feel closeness to Hashem is only through one's soul, and only the soul can recognize its Creator and feel love toward Him, like how a son feels love to his father. It is thus upon us to understand how one can reach a level in which his soul is awakening him to *Teshuvah*.

### **19.**

A person is made up of a body and a soul, and the body conceals the soul. If a person wants to reveal his soul, he needs to remove the barriers of the body that conceal it. How can a person do this? There are several ways.

Rabbeinu Yonah writes: "A person can reach shame when he sits in solitude and reflects on the greatness of Hashem, and how evil it is to rebel against Him, and by remembering always that Hashem sees his actions and inspects his innards, and views his thoughts."

In his words are contained three ways how we can get through to our soul: by sitting in solitude, by thinking about the greatness of Hashem, and by remembering always that Hashem sees what we do.

Let us explain each way.

### **20.**

The soul is like a *kol demamah dakah*, a "soft, subtle voice." The body, by contrast, is like a "great, noisy voice." The body and its desires are very strong and are felt easily, while the soul's desires are deep and subtle, not easily felt.

Therefore, if a person's body is always at the fore of things, a person can't reach his soul, which is a "soft, subtle voice." A person needs to bring himself into a state in which he hears an inner voice.

The first step in doing this is *hisbodedus* (solitude). Many great leaders of previous generations practiced it, and the Chofetz Chaim practiced it for two hours a day. (We are not advising here that everyone do *hisbodedus* for two hours a day). When a person has *hisbodedus*, he has an inner silence, and through that it is easier to get through to his soul and leave his noisy bodily state. He can leave the noise of the body and enter into the soft, subtle voice of the soul.

*Hisbodedus* cannot be done in a pressurized way. A person has to be calm and relaxed for it; if not, the body still has a hold on the person, and a person will not be able to reach his inner world. It is recommended for this to do it outside your house, faraway from people. A quiet surrounding can give a person an inner calm.

## 21.

What should a person do during this time of solitude?

Rabbeinu Yonah writes: "To think about the greatness of Hashem." This is a general term; let us explain it more in detail.

A person has to think and remember that he is limited, while Hashem is unlimited. First, a person should look around at the world and see, "*How great are Your actions, Hashem.*" After this, a person should see himself as only a small part of the world, and how the world is thousands of times greater than his eyes can see. Then, a person can reflect that there are even more planets and stars which he cannot see, and he begins to realize how small of a speck he is in comparison to Hashem. Eventually, a person will feel how big Hashem is, in comparison to how small he is.

Then a person can reflect that he is only small in terms of his physical body, but he has a G-dly soul, which is a "*portion of Hashem.*" Since the soul is a piece of Hashem, it cannot be small. Now a person can feel a need to connect to his own soul and come out of his tininess, and to connect to Hashem, who is endless. Slowly more and more, a person can awaken a desire to reveal his soul.

## 22.

The last point which Rabbeinu Yonah writes is that a person should reflect that Hashem sees all that he does. Let us elaborate on this point as well.

A person should think that Hashem is actually found right next to him, for "*His glory fills the entire world.*" Just like there is a floor underneath you and a table to sit by, so is Hashem next to you as real as can be, and His presence is even more real than anything else you see. Think about this for many hours, until you begin to actually feel it.

When a person hasn't yet reached his soul, he won't come to do proper *Teshuvah*. Only when a person feels his soul can he feel closeness with Hashem, and when one feels that closeness, he is bothered by a sin and feels how it distances him from Hashem. He will be awakened to feel shame and the pain of the *Shechinah*, which are natural feelings of the soul.

## 24.

To feel closeness with Hashem is not just about leaving our sins. It is a concept which must envelope every aspect in our life. Whatever we do, we should feel that we are doing it because this is the will of our Father, and when we merit this awareness, all our life is spent on the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av* - honoring our Father.

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[\[1\]](#) *Shaarei Teshuvah 1: 11*

[\[2\]](#) *Sukkah 52a*

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