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## Tefillah - 058 Complete Teshuvah

### ***Teshuvah Shelaimah: "Complete" Teshuvah***

In the blessing of **השיבנו**, we mention three kinds of *teshuvah*: returning to Hashem, returning to the Torah, and returning to "complete" *Teshuvah*. What does it mean to do "complete *Teshuvah*"?

The basic concept behind *teshuvah* is to "return" - to return to the original state we were in. Every sin affects a certain part of the body; when a person does *teshuvah*, he returns the damaged part of the body, to its original, undamaged state.

The *Nefesh HaChaim* says that every word of Torah is pure, even words such as "Pharaoh", "Bilaam", and "Amalek", who represent the most evil and impure forces in Creation. Therefore, first we ask Hashem to return us to the Torah, because from the power of Torah, we can have the strength to restore everything back to its original purity. That explains the first part of the blessing, in which we ask Hashem to return us to the Torah: **השיבנו אבינו לתורתך**.

But what does it mean to do complete *teshuvah*, **החזירנו בתשובה שלימה לפניך**?

### ***Five Levels of Teshuvah***

The soul of man is comprised of five layers, which are called the *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah*, and *Yechidah*<sup>[1]</sup>. Each part of our soul requires its own *teshuvah*. Thus, *teshuvah* doesn't end with just abandoning sinful deeds, for there are more layers to the soul than the plane of action.

### ***The Prerequisite To Teshuvah: Giving Order To Our Soul***

Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* that a person *teshuvah* is to abandon the improper path that one is on; thus, it's not enough to just abandon sin - a person must leave the very path that he is on.

The depth of this is because until we give inner order to our soul, the abilities of our soul remain mixed up with each other, and there is a lack of orderliness in the soul. This is essentially what causes a person to keep sinning again and again even after he repents. Thus, in order to do *teshuvah*, a person must abandon the crooked path he is on - by sorting out what's going on in his own soul.

### ***Rectifying The Five Layers Of Our Soul***

The *teshuvah* we can do during Elul and Tishrei is specially designed for us to rectify the entire soul,

in all its five layers. Thus, the teshuvah we can do in Elul and Tishrei enables us to reach the level of *teshuvah shelaimah*.

If a person only does *teshuvah* for the bad deeds he did that year, he has only done *teshuvah* on the lowest part of his soul, the *Nefesh*, which is the realm of his actions. There is much more to fix than just the sinful actions.

A person has to penetrate into his entire soul and do *teshuvah* for all of the soul's layers. Our soul is like a ladder footed on earth, and its head reaches the heavens. The *Yechidah*, the highest part of the soul, is really in the Heavens, and the ladder in our soul extends from our lowest aspect all the way until the heavens, which is the *Yechidah*.[\[2\]](#)

### ***The Five Layers of the Soul***

Our soul, beginning from lowest to highest, consists of:

1. **Our actions (*Nefesh*),**
2. **Our emotions (*Ruach*),**
3. **Our thoughts (*Neshamah*),**
4. **Our source of vitality (*Chayah*),**
5. **Our point of connection with Hashem (*Yechidah*).**

Thus, when we do *Teshuvah*, we need to first clarify what's going on in our soul, beginning from the lowest layer (action) to the highest point (our connection to Hashem).

### ***Deep Self-Accounting***

For example, when we make self-accounting and we examine the deeds that we committed this year, besides for simply becoming aware of the actions that we did this year, we need to become also become aware of the emotions that were behind those actions. For example, we can examine if we are doing the *mitzvos* with enough enthusiasm.

This is how we connect our "*Ruach*" with our *Nefesh*: we examine the emotion that was behind the action, in addition to examining the action itself.

Then we need to connect *Ruach* to our *Neshamah*. The *Neshamah* is the area of our Torah thoughts that we have learned about. In order to connect our *Ruach* with *Neshamah*, we should analyze if our emotions are aligned with the thoughts of Torah that we learned this year.

Thus, if we see that our emotions aren't matching the Torah, and if our actions are lacking feeling, we can see that there is more *teshuvah* to be done.

### ***The Depth of Doing Teshuvah***

What is *teshuvah*? The superficial answer is that we repent from our sins. This is what we are used to thinking ever since we were young. This is true, but that is not all there is to it.

The first thing we must know is how we begin doing *Teshuvah*. First we need to begin with the lowest part of soul, our *Nefesh*, which is the area of our deeds. But at the same time, we must be aware of the goal of all this, which is to arrive at the highest part of our soul: the part in our soul which deeply connects with Hashem. This is the depth of what it means to stand *lifnei Hashem*, "in front of Hashem", which is the ultimate goal of all the entire *teshuvah* process of these days.

If a person does *teshuvah* for just his deeds, and when it comes Yom Kippur he takes upon himself resolutions to better himself, even if he feels elation and purity from Yom Kippur (anyone who doesn't feel purity on Yom Kippur is very far from any vestige of spirituality), if he stops doing *teshuvah* at a certain point, it shows that he's missing a certain fundamental understanding about *teshuvah*.

Thus, we need to really understand what *teshuvah* is, by using our *daas* (mature and spiritual thinking). To just go through learning the *Hilchos Teshuvah* of the Rambam is being superficial. Even if a person feels some purity on Yom Kippur, this is not enough. We should not be satisfied from this.

### **The Goal of Teshuvah: To Stand Before Hashem**

*Teshuvah* is a five-step process, as we explained, and the goal is to deeply connect with Hashem, to be able to stand "in front of Hashem", after we have become purified from the *teshuvah* process. Thus, one has to see how much he came to realize that he stands in front of Hashem, after all the *teshuvah* of Elul is done.

Moshe went up to Heaven for 40 days to receive the Torah, after the sin with the Calf. The depth behind this was not just so that he should wait for 40 days until Hashem forgave us. It was because he wanted to receive the Torah again in its purity from the One who gave it, after the *teshuvah* had been completed. He wanted to receive a Torah that is "*lifnei Hashem*" as before. This helps us understand what *teshuvah* is: its ultimate goal is so that we come to realize that we are *lifnei Hashem*.

Hashem breathed into a man a breathe of His life, so to speak. When a person does *teshuvah*, he essentially has to return to the original breathe of life which Hashem breathed into us.

When we come to do *teshuvah*, our ultimate goal must be, to seek a *teshuvah shelaimah* - to do *teshuvah* with awareness of the goal, that we want to be able to stand before Hashem in purity when it comes Yom Kippur, after we have done *teshuvah* in Elul.

### **Returning To Our Father**

Thus, we can now have a greater depth of understanding in the words of *Shemoneh Esrei*, **השיבנו אלינו לתורתך, וקרבתנו מלכינו לעבודתך, והחזירנו בתשובה שלימה לפניך**.

We ask Hashem to return us to the Torah, and to serving Him, because this will prepare us to have be able to have complete *Teshuvah*. Real *Teshuvah* is not just to "return" to Hashem after sinning. It is to return to the level of our "Father", as we express in *Shemoneh Esrei*, **השיבנו אלינו** - "Return us, our Father."

We must understand that only Hashem can return us to *teshuvah*. It is all due to the spiritual light which Hashem allows us to have during these days. We can only do *teshuvah* because Hashem helps us, and in addition, we need to do *teshuvah* with Hashem in the equation. We return to Hashem **from** Hashem's help, and **with** awareness of Hashem, as we do *teshuvah*.

This understanding will totally change how you approach *teshuvah*. We say in the *Selichos* that "Your right hand is open to accept those who return." These are days in which Hashem more readily returns us to Him.

Thus, all of our *avodah* of *teshuvah* during Elul must be done with awareness of this greater goal: that we want to arrive at deep closeness with Hashem, returning to the level of "Our Father". Therefore, we must do *teshuvah* with Hashem in the equation, understanding that we can only do *teshuvah* with Hashem's help, and that our goal of doing *teshuvah* is to reach closeness with Hashem.

## ***In Conclusion***

We should absorb this inner perspective on how to do *teshuvah*: the perspective that comes from our *neshamah* [to repent completely because we want to return to a complete bond with Hashem], as opposed to the superficial perspective towards *teshuvah* that comes from the body [to only repent over sins].

May we all merit to reach the level of complete *teshuvah*.

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[1] These five layers of our soul are mentioned in ***Sefer Derech HaShem*** (Ramchal), ***Nefesh HaChaim*** (Rav Chaim Volozhiner), and ***Tanya*** (Rav Shlomo Zalman of Liadi)

[2] The nature of the *Yechidah* is explained in the Rav's series, ***"Reaching Your Essence"***.

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**Source:** <http://bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-058-complete-teshuvah>