

## "RETURNING TO OUR SOURCE"

### TESHUVAH - RETURNING TO HASHEM THROUGH ABANDONING PAST SINS

“השיבנו אבינו לתורתך” - “Return us, our Father, to Your Torah.”

When a person sins, (*rachmana litzlan* – May Hashem have mercy upon him), there are three aspects of *teshuvah* that he needs, as we say in this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*. Besides for the fact that he has sinned against Hashem, he has also distanced himself from the Torah.

Thus, when we seek to do *teshuvah*, not only do we ask Hashem to return us to Him, but we also ask to be returned to the Torah, that we should once again keep the Torah. The final step of the *teshuvah* is when we merit a “complete *teshuvah*” – **החזירנו – בתשובה שלימה לפניך**.

So first, we ask Hashem to return us to the state in which we recognize Him as our Father. **השיבנו אבינו**. Then, we ask Hashem that we be returned to His Torah. **השיבנו אבינו לתורתך**. We can then merit to come to a “complete” *teshuvah*, which this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* concludes with – **החזירנו – בתשובה שלימה לפניך**.

*Teshuvah* is to return. To where are we returning to? To Hashem.

### RETURNING TO THE PROPER PATH IN LIFE – TO ABANDON THE INDULGENCE IN PERMISSIBLE DESIRES

On a more subtle note, even if we wouldn't sin, we still need to do *teshuvah*, because even if a person doesn't sin, he can still be far from Hashem. The essence of *teshuvah* is to return to our Source, even if we haven't sinned. This is because a person can still be distanced from Hashem even if he doesn't sin.

For example, there is a concept of “a disgusting one who acts within the permission of the Torah.”<sup>[1]</sup> When a person lives for his body and not for his soul, he indulges in physical pleasures that are not prohibited by the Torah. Although he hasn't sinned, he has indulged in his body, and he needs to abandon this situation - as well and return to his source, his soul's source, which is Hashem and the Torah.

When a person sins, the sin puts constraint on his connection with Hashem; that is very clear. But even if a person doesn't sin, and even if he has done *teshuvah* over the sin, he can still be heavily attached to materialism, and this will prevent a person from connecting himself to Hashem.

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## LIVING A LIFE OF THE SOUL

*Rabbeinu Yonah* in *sefer Shaarei Teshuvah* writes that a person needs to to abandon his improper path, in order to do *teshuvah*. This can even be referring to a kind of person who lives religiously, but his soul is not revealed in his life. He does not feel his soul, and instead he lives life through his body. Although he puts on his *tallis* and *tefillin* in the morning, it's only on his body, because he lives and experiences life entirely through his body.

*Teshuvah* is not just about leaving our sins; it is about abandoning the very path a person is at [initially] in his life, which is heading towards materialism.

## THE ROOT OF A LIFE OF SOUL: REALIZING THAT HASHEM IS OUR FATHER

**השיבנו אבינו לתורתך וקרבתנו מלכינו** – “Return us, our Father, to Your Torah; and draw us close, our King, to serve You.” After we return to keeping the Torah, we can return to serving Hashem. But the very first thing we need to realize that Hashem is our Father - and that we are His children. The blessing starts out with the words **השיבנו אבינו** - “Return us, our Father.” That is the first thing we need to realize: Hashem is “our Father”.

If a person doesn't realize this, he is saying words that aren't truthful to where he is right now; his mouth and heart are not in line with each other. Although Chazal established that we all say

this *tefillah* in *Shemoneh Esrei*, if a person doesn't realize the truth of what he is saying, from a deeper perspective he is saying something that's not true to his life.

## GETTING IN TOUCH WITH YOUR INNER SOUL'S DESIRES

So a person must ask himself how much he is in touch with his soul in his life. How can one recognize it? Our soul loves spirituality – such as Torah, mitzvos, and connecting with Hashem. By contrast, our body loves This World and its desires.

For example, let us examine the emotion of love which we are familiar with. What do we love? Is our love only being experienced through our physical desires? Desire [by itself] is not the same thing as love. On another note, if we “love” something of This World, that's not “love” – it is simply desire.

## TESHUVAH – REPENTING AND RETURNING

The first part of *teshuvah*, simply, is to repent from our sins. That is the obvious part. But in addition, we need to uncover the deeper aspect of *teshuvah*, which is that we must realize that we are returning to our Source: our Father.

Ask yourself the following: If we would be given more life on this world, would we stay here so we can do more mitzvos? Or we would we want to stay here so we can continue to enjoy this world's pleasures...?

*Teshuvah* is a deep power in our soul, to wish to return, to our point of origin. When a person learns

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Torah and does mitzvos, he can still be living a life of the body.... even if he still sits in *yeshivah* for many years and always learns Torah every day!

The deep aspect of *teshuvah* is to realize that we are children of Hashem, that we are a *neshamah* (Divine soul). And just as the body enjoys the pleasures of this world, so does our *neshamah* yearn for Hashem, for Torah, and for mitzvos.

## OUR AVODAH: REVEALING OUR NESHAMAH

But we do not need to “acquire” an enjoyment for Hashem and for Torah; it is already there in our soul! The problem is that the soul isn’t often revealed, because the body is initially dominant on a person, and it is concealing the soul.

Therefore, our *avodah* is thus not to acquire our spiritual feelings. Rather, our *avodah* is to **reveal our *neshamah***, from its potential state into its active state - and then we will naturally love Hashem and Torah, as an automatic result.

## YEARNING TO LIVE A LIFE OF NESHAMAH

People who are able to sit and learn their whole life and to love learning Torah are able to do so not because they always have the answers to all their questions when they learn. It is rather because they have succeeded in uncovering their natural yearning for Hashem and for his Torah.

Therefore, we must be aware when we do *teshuvah*, that we need to return to our original Source, the way

we were originally, when we were pure. To illustrate, a child cries when he is looking for his home. Why does he cry? It is because he yearns to return to his home, to his source.

If a person lives life through his body, even if he learns Torah and does mitzvos, he lives an animalistic kind of existence. One must reveal the light of the *neshamah* in his life.

That is all part of the *teshuvah* process that one needs to do, in addition to how he needs to abandon sin. If a person doesn’t have a constant yearning to return to his soul, if he doesn’t feel a burning kind of desire of his soul to return to Torah and to do Hashem’s will - then he has to do *teshuvah* exactly about this problem!

One needs to yearn to return to an inner kind of life in which he recognizes that his soul is his true source, wishing that he could return to his original state of purity.

## THE MAIN KIND OF TESHUVAH NEEDED IN OUR TIMES

Most people in today’s world are not entrenched in sin - rather, the main problem we see today is that people are simply entrenched in a “body” kind of life.

*Teshuvah* is not about learning “more” Torah and “doing” mitzvos. It is about living a life of *neshamah*. It is that when we go to sleep at night, our *neshamah* continues to yearn for more closeness with Hashem and with Torah. It is that when we

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get up in the morning, we feel this yearning of our *neshamah*, and that we continue to feel this yearning even as we walk in the street.

Therefore, besides for doing *teshuvah* for our past sins, an essential part of our *teshuvah* is that we need to search for an inner kind of life, in which we feel ourselves yearning to return to our original purity.

Do any of us want next year to be the same as this year? If we want next year to really be different than this past year, we must have a constant yearning every day and all the time to live a life of yearning for Hashem, for Torah, and for mitzvos.

## LETTING GO OF THIS WORLD

To help give yourself an idea of how you can work on this, each of us should imagine what the day of death will look like, when our soul will leave our body.

If we always think about this – in a serene way of course, and not to be sad or morbid about it – we can begin to feel that our *body* is *not* who we *are*. We will then be able to feel that our real self is our *neshamah*. One day, we will leave our body.

Thinking about this will help you realize the inner world that is going on inside of you.<sup>[2]</sup>

We must realize that the kind of world we see in front of us - even though there is much Torah and mitzvos today - is a lifestyle that is centered around interests of the body. We need to uncover the perspective of our *neshamah* and experience life through it. Of course, this will involve a lot of *avodah* to get there, but this is the root that we can uncover and be in touch with.

## IN CONCLUSION

May we merit from Hashem to understand that there is a kind of inner life we can live, in which we can return to our Source - to merit to return to our Father, and thereby come to have complete *teshuvah*.

תפילה 057 השיבנו לקבה ולתורה

[1] See *Ramban to Parshas Kedoshim 19:1*

[2] For more details, see ***Bilvavi Part 4, Chapter 5 – Calmly Letting Go Of This World***



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