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Year 6 | Issue 1

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שבת שובה

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

The Gift of Teshuva

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Part I. The Difficulty of Teshuva

Understanding Teshuva

Our subject for tonight is, of course, שובה ישראל עד השם אלך. Yom Kippur is only a few days away and therefore "Shuvah" is the subject that's most important right now.

It's a very big subject – עד השם means all the way back to Hashem and so it must be big – but tonight we're going to study the introduction to teshuvah. And the preface is very important because whatever teshuvah we're going to accomplish before Yom Kippur – after Yom Kippur too – depends on the important foundation of understanding what teshuvah means.

In the first chapter of his Shaarei Teshuva, Rabbeinu Yonah brings many pesukim where nevi'im are speaking to the Am Yisroel and encouraging them to do teshuvah. It's Hakodosh Boruch Hu talking through His prophets and He is pleading with us, – שובו לאשר העמיקו סרה –

שׁׁבוּ בָנִים – **שׁׁובְבִים** – Come back you backsliding children (Yirmiyahu 3:22). Constantly the nevi'im are urging us. That's one of the primary reasons why Hashem sent nevi'im in the days of old, to encourage us to do teshuvah.

Assisted in Teshuva

But not only in the times of old. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is constantly reminding us to do teshuvah and giving instructions on how to return to Him. That's why he sent mechabrim subsequently. He sent Rabbeinu Yonah to write this sefer to remind us. The Chovos Halevavos has a section on teshuvah to remind us. The Rambam has Hilchos Teshuvah to remind us. Wherever you look, all these shelves full of seforim are reminding us. All of these great mechabrim, people who lived in times before, have left a legacy of reminders.

Right now you are being reminded. You are sitting here for an hour and a half being reminded. Now, I'm not worthy of reminding you but there were many mochichim from generation to generation and I'm just telling you things that people bigger than me have said. And all of that is the Yad Hashem, the hashgacha of Hashem, so that we should be constantly urged to do teshuvah.

That's why it says about Hashem, טֹב וַיֵּשֶׁר הַשֵּׁם – He is good and just, עַל בִּן יְוָהָה חֲפָאִים בְּרָךְ (25:8). It doesn't mean He teaches them Torah; that's a different subject. Torah is a very great subject but we are not talking about that now. "He teaches sinners the way" means that He is teaching people who have caused themselves trouble, the way to climb out of the pit. He teaches them to rescue themselves before retribution starts coming upon them, before it's too late.

The Benevolent Police Association

Now, that's only because Hashem is טֹב וַיֵּשֶׁר, because He is good and just; He wants to help us. Suppose there's a law that you cannot park in a certain place and you know the consequences – it'll cost you \$25 – but suppose the policeman is kind enough to walk back and forth in that place, "No, no. Don't park here. It will cost you money." So you'd say that's a very benevolent administration. Not only did they make laws, but they are trying to save you from being penalized.

But Hakodosh Boruch Hu does much more than that. Because even after a man already gets himself into trouble and he's already sick with aveiros, Hashem is teaching him, showing him the way to be cured. Imagine you go to a doctor for an ailment *chas v'shalom* and the doctor

tells you this and this prescription you must take. So you're very happy now – you have something now, some medicine, to relieve you from this sickness. But suppose that after giving you the prescription the doctor would call you up twice a day to make sure. "Are you taking your medicine? Every day, twice a day? I want to hear that you're feeling better." And he reminds you how to take it, the right dose at the right time. That's a good doctor. I don't know if there exists such a doctor.

An Ancient Mentality

Now, all that is good and well, no question about it. But we note something else in these pesukim, a puzzle. Because not only is the Navi reminding us and encouraging us, but He's trying to convince us that it works! He's trying to persuade us that teshuvah will actually wipe away our sins.

Again and again we are urged to come back to Hashem because He will accept you; שׁׁוּבוּ בְּנֵיכֶם שׁׁוּבָנִים אַרְפָּה מִשׁׁׁוּבָתִיכֶם – Return My backsliding children, and I will heal your backsliding (*ibid.*). Hashem promises, "I will accept your teshuvah and forgive you." The nevi'im are constantly telling the people it is not too late to do teshuvah, always reminding them that they can still repair their misdeeds. "Teshuvah works," the Navi proclaims.

Now to us sitting here tonight it seems that their words are unnecessary. What's the chiddush? Of course, we can do teshuvah and be forgiven; who thought not? Every cheder boy knows that. But we see from the nevi'im that the people argued. "Do you mean to say after all this Hashem is going to accept our teshuvah?! It can't be!" And Hakodosh Boruch Hu sends a message through the Navi, "Yes. Never despair. You can always do teshuvah."

And it went back and forth, back and forth, many times; the sinners doubted there was a way back, and Hashem was constantly reiterating, "Shuvah Yisroel!"

So we see it is a conspicuous aspect of the ancient mentality that people thought that it is not easy to do teshuvah, even impossible, once you pass a certain point.

The Modern Mentality

Today it's different; today it seems so simple to everybody. Some people who learn the Shaarei Teshuva want to skip over these pesukim – they're so repetitive, they feel. We don't have to be convinced; of course we can do teshuvah whenever we want and we'll be forgiven. The truth is that we are not even in a hurry because we know that it's merchandise that we can always get; it is always around and available. We will be twenty

שׁוּב יֹם אַחֲרֵל פָּנֵי מִתְּהֻךְ - even years old, forty years old, eighty years old, even one day before we leave this world, we'll still be able to be forgiven. Any time you want, you can open up the door, walk into the synagogue and you have arrived. You're a *baal teshuvah* now; it's all over. Of course, you will have to conform to everything in the Torah from now on, but your past you can erase.

And even a man who killed somebody – an actual case; I know the man. He grew a nice big bushy black beard and put on a black hat; he accepts the Torah now. He lives like an Orthodox Jew and it's all settled. He has no worries about the past. And surely we are safe; we never killed anyone. We did smaller sins, that's all, and so we are good and ready for *teshuvah* – we don't need to be convinced of its effectiveness.

It's a strange thing, this confident attitude that we have more than the ancients. It should bother us. Why is it that today we are so confident that Hakodosh Boruch Hu accepts us *b'teshuvah*, we know all these things without needing to hear the *Navi*, whereas our ancestors were not so certain about that and they had to be constantly reassured that they could do *teshuvah*?

Religious Wars

The answer is: not because they were less intelligent than we are. It's because they were *more* intelligent – they knew what it means to do a sin. That's what made them intelligent, they understood that a transgression against the King is serious business.

You know when a man lives in a place where there is an absolute monarch so he understands what a sin is. In the olden days there was a king and when the king made a law, there was no playing around with it. Anybody who transgressed that law knew that his head was risky on his shoulders. If the king would discover his transgression, he'd be finished. That is how it was.

One time when the Mohammedans took over a certain country in Europe, they built a bridge across a big river. Now, there was a Christian who wanted to show his disrespect for the Mohammedan conquerors so he came in the middle of the night and he set fire to the bridge. Well, they discovered who did it – when you want, you can discover – and so they took a big pole and they sharpened the end and they greased it and they stuck it into his rectum, all the way up to his throat. And he was screaming! You could hear his screams all across the valley of the river. And then they hung him up near the bridge and he was screaming there for three days.

When they rebuilt the bridge, nobody touched that bridge anymore! That is how law and order was enforced in the good old days. That's why there was law and order in the good old days.

Not Just Recommendations

Now, when people lived with a government like that, they learned what it means to sin against the king. And they understood that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is a Melech gadol v'nora - a King to be feared, a King who intends that His laws should be obeyed. The mitzvos, the aveiros, it's not just *eitzah tova kamashma lan*, they're not just recommendations; they're commands. And it's a very big King who's Commanding you.

And therefore in the good old days people didn't deceive themselves like we do today. We think that Hashem is an easygoing father and we are reassured beforehand that it's nothing too serious. We think He's only Avinu and we like to forget about the Malkeinu. And therefore we say, "Echta v'ashuv - we sin but we know we can do teshuvah anyhow." We're confident because we know that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is a good father.

The truth is we don't believe in Hakodosh Boruch Hu; that's the real reason. To us "Hashem" is just a word in the siddur, and with a word you can get along easily. A word will be bribed just by growing a black beard and putting on a black hat. It's all over; the past is forgotten.

Oh no! There is no forgetting by Hakodosh Boruch Hu. And in the olden days they understood that clearly. Their *emunah* was so clear; it was *emunah chushis* - a physical belief in Hashem which is the real belief - and therefore they understood that they had rebelled against the King. They understood that they had done worse than burn down a little wooden bridge.

Reassured by Prophets

And therefore all those people who committed sins were skeptical that anything could help. They wanted to do teshuvah but what is the use? He has caught us red-handed with the goods and we're finished! They believed and they knew there was going to be punishment in this world and *puroniyos* in the next world. People believed in *Gehenom*; in those days you didn't have to convince anybody. They didn't have to come and hear *drashos* on Shabbos Shuvah. It was a tradition from the earliest days of mankind.

And therefore they were broken; they were dejected and so when the Navi urged them to do teshuvah, they didn't believe it would help. "We are guilty as charged and we're not going to fool ourselves! Of course, we'll

do mitzvos, we'll improve, we won't sin again but what's done is done. It can't be wiped away."

And so the Navi had to say it again and again and to assure them that the dalsei teshuvah are not going to be closed on you if you really repent. "And even if you committed many misdeeds," says Rabeinu Yonah, "and you rebelled against Hashem and were disloyal to Him, He does not lock upon you the doors of teshuvah." Somebody was very disloyal to Hashem and therefore he ought to deserve that Hashem should ignore him and no longer give him the opportunity to repair the damage he did to himself. No, even to the worst persons Hakodosh Boruch Hu still offers the opportunity to repent.

Part II. *The Healing of Teshuva*

The Unseen Soul

However, it's not only this understanding that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is a King to be feared. There's something else that the ancients had that we're missing, something else that they understood that made them worried about the efficacy of teshuvah. You know what we're lacking today? You might be insulted when I tell you; you'll say I'm hurling false claims against you but what can I do? I have to say it like it is: unlike us, our forefathers believed in the reality of the *neshamah*, the soul. We, on the other hand, not so much.

Now the *neshamah* is a difficult subject for us to grasp because it's invisible. For our modern minds, even *frum* minds, it's not so real; because we believe in things we see. And even though we may be *frum* Jews, very *frum*, and we are interested in doing good things, certainly, but the spiritual entities do not have any great reality to us. *Parnassah*, yes; a wife and children, yes. A home, yes. Even the *bais hamedrash* and the *bais haknesses*, yes. A *shofar* and a *lulav* and *esrog* and a *sukkah*, absolutely. All the things that we are capable of seeing and feeling, it's easy for us to think about and take seriously.

The *neshamah* on the other hand, its existence is almost ignored. Of course we admit it, but that's not enough; understanding the *neshamah* means that it's more real to you than your body. That's the plain truth. Even though we can't see it or touch it, the *neshamah* is an entity which is even more real than the body.

The Body Dissipates

We think the body is something but actually it's only a collection of gasses, mostly gasses, and when the time comes it all dissipates into the air. You think the body remains in the earth? Nothing ever remains in the earth. After a while the body disintegrates into gasses and it is wafted away into the atmosphere. That's the body. It's all imagination. **כְּחִלּוֹם יָעוֹף**, it's like a dream that passes away.

The *neshamah* however is real, infinitely more real than the body. It's actually a *chelek Eloka memaal*, an emanation from Hashem, and so it's more permanent than anything else.

And therefore it is important for us to always speak to ourselves about the great subject of our inner existence, what we really are. You are an entity that transcends all physical existence. The body is not you. The time will come when you'll take off your suit of flesh and bones and leave it in the ground, in Beth David Cemetery or wherever you bought yourself a plot, and it will begin to disintegrate. But you will still be around because you are your *neshamah*, not your body.

Seeking Medical Advice

Now, everyone takes measures to care for the health of their body. Who doesn't? Everyone wants their body to be happy and comfortable. And if there's a sickness, *chas v'shalom*, let's say the dreaded *machlah* that starts with the letter C, what doesn't a person do to heal himself? He'll speak to people who know, experts. He'll go to the best specialists, the top hospitals, and he'll spend all his money. Anything to save his body from destruction.

Now, if a person is so careful about this body that will one day evaporate into nothing – and he should be! – then how much more should he be interested in the welfare of his *neshamah*! The soul is the most vulnerable and sensitive part of his existence and the truth is that nothing in the world should interest him more than that.

And therefore it pays for us to listen to what Rabbeinu Yonah says about sins and the *neshamah*. He explains that like the body, the soul is subject to certain maladies, diseases of its own kind, and when a man commits a sin he has actually put a sickness into his *neshamah*.

Now, because our belief in the *neshamah* is so superficial so we don't react to a statement like that. After all, would a man take his body and expose it to AIDS? Suppose a person with AIDS is sitting next to you in the bus and he is coughing; when he coughs, droplets of moisture come out

of his mouth. You'd run away from him. If need be, you'd jump out the window. It is a *sakanah gedolah*, a fatal disease, and you're not interested.

AIDS For The Neshamah

But suppose the man next to you is not coughing; he's not sharing AIDS droplets with you. But he opens his mouth and words come out of his mouth; he is talking *divrei minus*, or *leitzanus* or *lashon hora*. So would you jump off the bus? Of course not. At best you'll disregard him. It's like disregarding the man with AIDS; disregarding won't help you a lot.

So why aren't you careful? Because your body, that's something "real", so you're cautious. The *neshamah*? It's an idea; you think about it sometimes, but it's only an idea after all. And so you're not afraid of sin. You might be lax with a *mitzvas asei* or with a *lo sa'asei*. You might open up a *treif* book and read it. Maybe you'll listen to a radio program of *leitzanus*; if you're entirely *meshuga* you'll watch TV programs. You'll say things you shouldn't and you won't say things you should. You'll dabble with this sin and that sin.

All your days you're demonstrating that you don't believe in the existence of the *neshamah*; you don't really believe that the *neshamah* can be affected by external conditions. And that's serious business because the disease of the *neshamah* is the most perilous of all illnesses, more serious, more fatal, than any illness of the body. הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַחֲטָאתָה רֹיָה תִּמְתֹּה – The sinful soul is going to die (Yechezkel 18:4). Very many die in this world and those who don't will find that in the next world there is waiting for them even a worse kind of death. Absolutely, sin is a cancer on the *neshamah*.

The Princess and The Pea

Not only big sins; the *neshamah* is sensitive to the smallest of sins. Even the smallest sin, if left untreated, is a cancer that will continue to devour the *neshamah*. If you said something mean to your wife, you're in great peril. You missed *zeman kriyas shema*, it's a cancer. You forgot *kiddush levanah*? Everything is big without *teshuva*. Like the Chovos Halevavos says, there's no such thing as a small sin if you don't repent of it. Without *teshuva*, that little sin becomes a most uncomfortable spot on your soul.

I always tell you this *mashal*. Suppose you are invited to a home to stay over at night and they give you a bed. But underneath the bed sheet, on the mattress, there is a bean. It's only one little bean but as you are lying there you are aware of it; that bean is pushing into you. It's very

uncomfortable; you can't ignore a bean that is lying underneath you on the bed.

That's what a small sin is. It's not something you can just forget about. It's there; it's very uncomfortable. Only that it's not a bean; it's a pinpoint cancer that is consuming the *neshamah*. There's a cancerous splotch on his *neshamah* and if it's untreated then it spreads.

Don't console yourself with the idea that it's only words. It's not just words. If you could see your *neshamah* you would see that by putting something into your mouth without a *bracha*, the *neshamah* immediately becomes splotched with telltale dots of cancer. Who would be crazy enough to take a bowl of sulphuric acid and eat it?

Regret Doesn't Help

Now, once a person knows that sin means that there are tumors growing all over the *neshamah*, *chas v'shalom* – tumors worse than cancer, more malignant, more dangerous, more fatal – so you begin to understand the puzzle that our *kadmonim* had. How is *teshuva* going to erase that? Just by fulfilling the steps of *teshuva*, the *neshamah* will be healed? If you know what a sin is and what a *neshamah* is, it sounds preposterous.

Imagine someone has cancer *chas v'shalom* in his liver, or in his lungs *chas v'shalom*. Or a tumor on the brain. Ay yah yay! A tumor on the brain! You can't just wipe it away. So how can you undo a sin? If a man corrupted his *neshamah* and introduced the fatal germs of sin and death into his soul, then how can you undo that?

Can you say he never did it? He is sorry, ten times sorry, but it's no use. A man is dying of AIDS in the hospital; he is very sorry for the things he did that brought him to this – what will it help him? Or he's dying of cancer. He's so sorry that he smoked for all those years? The surgeon general warned him on every box, "You'll get cancer and emphysema and this and that" but he didn't listen. Now he's sorry?! He wants to fulfill all the steps of *teshuva* now. He regrets it. It pains him that he smoked. He promises he won't do it again. No, it won't help. He'll lay there in the hospital dying anyhow.

And yet, for this cancer of the *neshamah*, for this fatal disease, something has been discovered. Along comes Hashem, the great *Rofei Cholim* who heals all, and He has invented a *chessed* called *teshuva*.

Regret Helps

That's what Rabbeinu Yonah tells us in his Shaarei Teshuva, in the first chelek, the first paragraph. "Among the benefits that Hashem Yisborach has bestowed upon his creatures, one of the most precious is that we can heal our souls." Hakodosh Boruch Hu has given us all kinds of benefits – many of them we recognize, some we don't – but among the greatest of benefits is that He prepared for us a way by which we can ascend from the pit into which we fell because of our misdeeds. He gives us a path to flee from the trap of our actions.

That's a tremendous kindness, a tremendous gift that Hakodosh Boruch Hu invented, that it's possible for us to undo our misdeeds. You can erase past history?! It's something we don't understand. We say it but there is no logic to back it up; it should be impossible to undo your misdeeds.

It's a *neis gadol!* People are constantly getting themselves into all kinds of trouble and their *neshomos* are diseased by their actions, and yet Hakodosh Boruch Hu has given man ways of combating the sickness of his soul which he is causing by his own deeds. He has provided us with means of protecting ourselves from the final sentence of going down early to the grave and then being judged in the World to Come, which is the worst of all misfortunes.

The Miracle Cure

So *teshuvah* is a miracle. A person can save himself by being sorry! A man sins and because he regrets his misdeeds Hakodosh Boruch Hu makes a special dispensation. He changes the course of the nature of the *neshamah* and He allows this man to remove from his soul that blemish, that spot of cancer that was to him a peril.

Of course, there are certain conditions to *teshuvah* – it's not as simple as superficially saying sorry – but the first thing is to realize what a great miracle that is, to be capable of undoing the past, of wiping out what happened before. Don't say it's simple. It's only simple if you don't know what a sin is, what a *neshamah* is.

And therefore it's important to always remember what an opportunity it is that we have. Hashem is willing to cure you and remove all the stains from your souls. He'll give you a clean *neshamah*, **אֱלֹקִי נֶשֶׁמָה שְׁנַתְתָ בֵי**, like when you were born.

Part III. The Desire for Teshuva

Don't Ignore the Doctors

Now, I don't want to make light of the *avodah* of teshuvah. It's not easy. Sometimes it's very difficult to do teshuvah. To achieve a cure for your *neshamah* depends on certain conditions that have to be fulfilled.

But once a person becomes aware of what it means a *neshamah* and what it means a *cheit*, he's willing to put in the work. Of course he is, because he's *meshuga* with worry. His *neshamah* is dotted with these little dots that show that the cancer is spreading and something has to be done.

He can't ignore it! Can you imagine such a fool who after the doctor tells him that the tests came back and they show cancer on the liver, that he'll just ignore it? He hopes that if he doesn't think about it so it won't affect him. A *meshuganeh*!

Any sane person won't ignore the doctor's orders. He won't skip any medicine, any treatment, because he knows that the better the conditions are satisfied and the more careful he is, the better the cure will be.

American Express Teshuva

And so, you can't just hand in your application for teshuvah during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva and be satisfied. Sometimes you have a person who hands in his application for forgiveness and right away he thinks that he's a pretty good fellow. He paid for a ticket in the synagogue for Yom Kippur and he's reading the words from the *machzor* – it means he went through the trouble of making an application and he thinks it's like going to the bank for a card. He puts in the application and so naturally he expects to get what he asked for.

No, no. Teshuva has certain conditions. There are *seforim* you have to learn. The Shaarei Teshuva, the Rambam Hilchos Teshuva, the Chovos Halevavos Shaar Hateshuva; other *seforim* too. Not only to read them; you have to take the words from the *seforim* and put them into your head.

The details of how you do teshuvah matter very much. How you take the medicine, which medicines, it matters. And everyone has their own sins, their own faults and character flaws, and so there's a lot to learn. And so you have to put in the time. People are busy reading other things – some people spend hours reading novels and magazines, other things – but they don't have time to read the *mechabrim* who want to teach them the path to teshuvah.

But that's not our subject tonight. How to make proper teshuvah deserves many lectures of its own; we don't have the time now. Tonight we're studying the first step, the preface, the greatest incentive to do teshuvah. And that's understanding how miraculous it is, what a gift it is. That's number one. To know what a gift we're being offered when Hakodosh Boruch Hu extends His hand out to us.

Grateful for The Gift

And that's why it's so valuable when we remind ourselves about this gift; every day we say שְׁם בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה הָרֹצֵחַ בְּתִשְׁוּבָה, we thank You, Hashem, that You want teshuvah. We thank You for that.

What does that mean? The problem is that we think we're doing a favor if we do teshuvah. It's a gift from us to Hashem. We pat ourselves on the back. "Oh, how nice we are."

And that's why we have to remind ourselves three times a day that Hashem is the one doing the favor. There's a possibility of my *neshamah* being healed? You're willing to accept repentance? You're willing to cleanse my soul and restore it to its original purity with which I was born?

"Yes," Hashem says. Like it says about those who do teshuvah, קָרְבָּן הָרֹצֵחַ אַתָּה לְכַבֵּד וְאַתָּה לְרַעַע – Hashem will once more circumcise your hearts. That means He'll cure you and bring your hearts back perfectly to Him once you start doing teshuvah.

Endless Gratitude

Ooh wah! Such an opportunity deserves the greatest gratitude! So we say שְׁם בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה הָרֹצֵחַ, we thank You Hashem, You accept teshuvah. שְׁמַת בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה הָרֹצֵחַ means "We bend our knee to You." We don't actually bend our knees in this place, but in our minds we are humbled, we are bent over. We thank You. We didn't expect it. We don't deserve it. You're willing to accept us back again! It is a remarkable miracle and it cannot be overemphasized how much we have to express gratitude for that: שְׁמַת בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה הָרֹצֵחַ that You're willing to accept our teshuvah.

But not only that. Not only is He willing, but He even favors us when we come back to Him. He smiles upon us if we do teshuvah. Harotzeh means it's a *ratzon*. He likes us. Oh, that's even more! We didn't think of such a thing. We were happy that He let us come back at all. But He takes us back with open arms? He welcomes us back? Oh, שְׁמַת בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה הָרֹצֵחַ You even desire teshuvah.

Desire and Attian

Now, one more thing before we conclude. We say that Hashem is rotzeh b'teshuvah, He wants teshuvah; but we have to want it too. Just to talk about it, to thank Him because He wants it, that's not enough. You have to want it too – you have to desire teshuvah. And if you desire it with all your heart then Hakodosh Boruch Hu will desire it too. If you desire teshuvah, Hashem will desire it from you and He'll help you achieve it.

That's a fundamental principle in the way Hakodosh Boruch Hu conducts Himself with people: בְּרוּךְ שָׂרֵם רֹצֶה לִלְכַּת מוֹלִיכִין אֲוֹתוֹ – in the way that a man wants to go, he will be led. It applies to everything. Usually if a man sets out to become a barber, Hakodosh Boruch Hu gives him success and he becomes a barber.

But he has to set out. He'll start practicing on his little brother's hair. He'll tell his mother that she can save good money if she lets him give his little brother a haircut. If he's in a yeshivah so he'll find time to ply his trade by giving haircuts to other bochurim. Sooner or later he'll succeed. It doesn't mean he becomes a perfect barber – he might make mistakes here and there – but once you make up your mind to be a barber, probably you'll end up a barber.

That's the *klal gadol*, the way a man wants to go Hashem leads him. And once we know that's so, we understand that only if you desire teshuvah, then Hashem will desire it from you and He'll help you achieve it. And the more you desire it with all your heart the more Hakadosh Baruch Hu will desire to bring you back to Him.

Formalities Are Not Enough

But when a person doesn't have much interest in achieving forgiveness – it's Yom Kippur, it's that time of the year and it doesn't cost any money to ask for forgiveness so he says *ashamnu, bogadnu*; but his heart isn't into it – then he's not ready yet to receive the gift of teshuvah.

First of all, he's not convinced that sins are so bad. They're bad of course but he doesn't feel like he rebelled against a King. Secondly, he doesn't ever think about his *neshamah* and the splotches of cancer on his *neshamah* that are fatal.

And anyhow, even if his *neshamah* is very sick, who says Hashem actually forgives sins and will cure that disease? In his heart of hearts he still has the New York Times editorials in his mind, and therefore it's difficult for him to comprehend that there is a Hashem and *neshamos* and forgiveness. Only that he's a loyal Jew who as a boy adopted the ways of

the Torah or he was taught that way, and so he goes along with the formalities. It's a formality, that's all.

Formalities Are Something

Now, even that is a good thing; even a formality is something because there's no such thing as a man doing something and being divorced entirely from his words and his actions. So if you act in this way as if you're asking for forgiveness, to a certain extent it's so.

That's why the *frum* Jew shouts when he asks סליחה לנו, מיחיל לנו, בפֶר לנו. Sometimes he shouts more than he actually feels, but it's advisable anyhow because חחיתניות מעוררת את הפנימיות the exteriority awakens the interiority and by shouting, he begins to hear how important the subject is. And even if you don't – let's say you're still quite cold hearted – but if you're fortunate enough to daven among such Jews, so a little bit rubs off on you. Nevertheless, the more of a formality it is, the less it's a teshuvah that heals.

Get Real!

But when a man is asking because he has learned to feel that he is his *neshamah*, that's his true self, and he understands what a sin does to the *neshamah*, that's a different type of teshuvah. When he understands that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is the Healer who forgives sins and heals the *neshamah*, so he realizes that all of his future depends on achieving forgiveness. *בְּעֵמֶק הַסְלִיקָה לְמַעַן תִּרְאָא* – With You is the power of forgiveness in order that man should fear You (Tehillim 130:4). When you know that without Hashem's favor and forgiveness, there's no hope in this world or the Next World, and you ask for forgiveness with all your heart, that's when you really deserves it.

And therefore we're learning now the necessity of earnestly yearning to be reconciled with the Father, to be forgiven by the King. To a very big extent it depends on the degree of your desire. Therefore the utmost importance is to be a רוץ, you have to desire it, you have to want to be forgiven, that's how important it is.

Ah, to desire teshuvah! To desire selichah u'mechilah! That's the first achievement – even before you make teshuvah, the first step is to be filled with gratitude that Hakodosh Boruch Hu gave you the opportunity. "A neis gadol! Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants me back. He's waiting for me to do teshuvah, and by means of that my *neshamah* will be cured again. It's like techiyas hameisim! The cancer on my *neshamah* will be healed. I'm so grateful to You for that and I want to achieve that. I want to make use of that gift. It's the biggest happiness I could imagine.

Celebrating Teshuvah

Everyone knows that on motzei Yom Kippur it's a custom of Jews that they make it a sort of Yom Tov. It's a beautiful *minhag*. They go home, they set a table, and everybody is in a festive mood. Everyone is eating and drinking and celebrating the achievements of Yom Kippur.

But it's a mistake what people are thinking. You imagine that it's because you did such a great job on Yom Kippur and now you are enjoying the fruits of your labor. Some people after *neilah* they're so proud of themselves. When they bow at *maariv*, so they're bowing to themselves. "Congratulations Chaim! You did such a good job!"

Oh no! Don't congratulate yourself that you deserve a full pardon for whatever happened. No, that's not the right attitude. You're celebrating because you're full of gratitude that He performed for you such a great miracle, something impossible to understand, that you've been restored to Hashem's favor by means of His forgiveness. And therefore you're so happy with regaining that favor, regaining that status as a loyal subject, that you're celebrating it.

And once you've been accepted once more as a loyal subject to the king so you'll make up your mind that all year round you want to maintain that. This gain that you achieved, that Hashem favors you and that the King has taken you back as a loyal subject, you'd like to continue that from now on all year, and all your life.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Acquiring A Teshuvah Attitude

This week as we work on teshuvah, I will *bli neder* set aside one minute each day to reflect on what we've learned about teshuvah. A sin is a terrible cancer on the soul, more real than physical illness. Only Hashem's great kindness has decreed that teshuvah has the power to erase that and we must be filled with gratitude to Him for He desires our teshuvah.

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

WITH RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT" L

שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

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Q:

We say Avinu Malkeinu during these days of teshuvah and I noticed that in Shmoneh Esrei, in the bracha of teshuvah (*השבינו*) and in the bracha of selichah (*סליח לנו*) we use those words. Why is 'Avinu Malkeinu' used in those brachos specifically?

A:

Because to come back to Hakodosh Boruch Hu we must learn to love Hashem, and to come back to Hakodosh Boruch Hu we must learn to fear Hashem. Avinu, our Father, means the One who loves us and we love Him. And Malkeinu, our King, means the One who controls everything in our lives like a king; and we fear a king.

Now, when we actually gain an awareness of what it means to fear Hashem and to love Hashem, that itself is teshuvah. Teshuvah is not merely doing things; it's understanding things. So the more you are aware of Hashem as Avinu, that itself is hashiveinu, that's coming back to Him. And the more you're aware of Hashem as Malkeinu, as your king, that itself means you're coming back to Hashem.

So remember that now: whenever anybody's contemplating getting better he has to learn the concept of Avinu, that's *ahavas Hashem*, loving Hashem, and Malkeinu, that's *yiras Hashem*.

Of course when *frum* Jews hear that, they're just clichés and they don't mean anything. But they have to become meaningful to us by means of practicing what it means to love Hashem and what it means to fear Hashem. And that's why these words are here, in *השבינו* and in *סליח לנו*, because teshuva and slichah depend of acquiring attitudes of Avinu and Malkeinu.

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Dedicated in honor of our father Ezra Halwani ש"טז

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