

THE WAY BACK

The Rebbe shows us the path to teshuva

REGRET AND RESOLVE

I received your letter, in which you ask for a way to do teshuvah for past misdeeds.

The first precondition to teshuvah is complete regret of past [misdeeds] and resolve to never again repeat your folly. The resolve towards the future [should consist of the following:] you should set aside time to recite words of Torah, Tehillim, and Zohar, as a form of repair and return. This should obviously be in addition to the regular set times of study that every Jew is required to keep.

You should also be scrupulous in reciting “*amein, yehei shmei rabbah...*”, *kedushah*, and “*borchu...*”. Most importantly, you should influence Jewish children towards loving Hashem, loving Torah, and loving their fellow Jews, each of whom is Hashem’s son.¹

REGRET, BUT NOT DEPRESSION

You write that you are sometimes depressed. This isn’t in keeping with the teachings of our Torah, the Torah of life, which commands each Jew to “Serve Hashem with joy”. Even when a person knows that he did things that he shouldn’t have, he must strengthen his trust in [Hashem who] gives us the Torah and Mitzvos, that He will give him the strength to do teshuvah and fulfill the Creator’s will. Of course, he must also regret his misdeeds, but he mustn’t be depressed at all. When one puts true effort into this, the teshuvah comes from deeper within the heart and atones for all of one’s sins.

You, a woman who is a mother and housewife, are obligated to act in this regard in the path of Torah, and through this you will improve the wellbeing of your husband, your children, and

yourself. [This applies] especially to those matters which are applicable to a woman; *tznius, taharas hamishpochah, kashrus*, and educating your children when they’re at home. I reiterate that this must be done out of joy and trust that the Creator of the world watches over you and will help you in all of your concerns.²

”און ווען מען ליגט אין ליכטיגקייט,
בדרך ממילא ווערט אראפגענומען די
פינסטערניש”

TESHUVAH IN THE PROPER TIME

When thoughts of regret over past misdeeds come to a person, he must **clarify**³ which “side” they are coming from; from his *Yetzer Tov* or its counterpart. The primary method of determining this is [by examining] the results of these thoughts; if the thoughts result in increased energy and liveliness in doing mitzvos and in the strengthening of one’s day-to-day conduct according to Shulchan Aruch (including, in your case, attendance in school) then this proves that their source is pure and good. If [however,] [these thoughts] produce depression, negligence, and laziness, or a feeling of despair, this proves that they come from the *Yetzer Horah* (who is clothed and concealed in a guise of fear of Heaven), since all of these (depression etc.) hamper a person in his serving Hashem. In your case, by doing good deeds you will give *nachas* to the soul of your father, of blessed memory, and not by having thoughts of despair and the like. Your spiritual counselor will certainly explain this at greater length, as it’s explained in **many** places.⁴

TESHUVAH THROUGH HAFOTZAS HAMAYONOS

You end your letter by writing “I request that I be enlivened by means of proper teshuvah, at least *teshuvah tata'ah* [the lower level of Teshuvah]”.

I have already answered several members of *Anash* in this regard that we stand in the very final moments before the coming of Moshiach, as the Rebbe, my father-in-law reiterated many times, there only remain “small jugs” to purify. It’s also understood that the vessel to facilitate the coming of Moshiach is *hafotzas hamayonos* [spreading the wellsprings of Chassidus outward]. You should endeavor to engage in *hafotzas hamayonos*, and there certainly exist, even in Jerusalem, individuals who can be categorized as “outsiders”. You should warm them and illuminate them with חסידישע ווארימע ליכטיקייט (the light of *Chassidus*), און ווען מען ליגט אין ליכטיגקייט, בדרך ממילא, (and when you’re surrounded by light, the darkness is removed of its own accord).

Should you need to eradicate and uproot improper thought, speech, and action, this can also be done in “the way of the right side” [positive action] by means of tears of joy, as explained in the meaning of “Cause tears to descend like a river”, and [you can eradicate] those aspects of intellect and emotions that aren’t so proper by means of the three loves: loving Hashem, loving Torah, and loving your fellow Jew; and by learning Torah, particularly the luminary within Torah – *Chassidus*, through which the darkness will be transformed into light.⁵

TESHUVAH WITH JOY

You write [asking for] a path of teshuvah; firstly, I must preface a point about teshuvah from *Chassidus*: that one of the foundations of [teshuvah] is joy and complete trust in the Creator and Leader of the world. This is because Teshuvah isn’t necessarily because of a sin, but rather - and this is the central point of every³ type of teshuvah - to return to the source and beginning of it all: to Hashem, who created us. [This is accomplished] through [living] a lifestyle in accordance with the teachings of our Torah, the Torah of life, and this is the common denominator between all of the methods of teshuvah [that different people do]; from the very simplest individual up until the most righteous *tzaddik*, upon all of whom teshuvah is incumbent.

When you don’t know what to do teshuvah for and which method of teshuvah to do, what I said [above] is the way that

includes within it all [of the methods]. It’s certainly superfluous to explain at length that the Torah lifestyle isn’t limited to Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, Shabbos, Yom Tov, and so on, but rather it is a daily lifestyle; there are more weekdays than days of Shabbos and Yom Tov, and so the [weekdays] require extra scrupulosity.

I reiterate that all of this can – and must – be done with joy and trust [in Hashem], and may I receive good news from your letters in the near future, about yourself, your household, and your entire family.⁶

“THIS IS THE CENTRAL POINT OF EVERY TYPE OF TESHUVAH - TO RETURN TO THE SOURCE AND BEGINNING OF IT ALL: TO HASHEM, WHO CREATED US.”

TESHUVA THROUGH FASTS? – ABSOLUTELY NOT!

In response to your letter: I was, of course, taken aback by its contents, particularly from the end of the letter, which apparently [states] that you wish to fast for 40 days.

Such behavior is contrary to what the Alter Rebbe (the author of *Tanya*, which adjudicates in the hidden part of Torah, and the *Shulchan Aruch*, which adjudicates in the revealed part of Torah) writes in *Igeres Hateshuvah*. I therefore hurry to write to you, and to send the letter in express [post], and may Hashem help that it has its desired effect, meaning that even if you made a spoken resolution to do all this, in which case you would require an annulment [of a vow] in the presence of three [people, constituting a Beis Din], you should [annul the vow] and tell [the Beis Din] that you were unaware of what it says in *Igeres Hateshuvah*. This has its source in the teaching of the Ba’al Shem Tov that “If you see the donkey of your enemy crouching under its load, you should help **with him**”⁷ **D**

1. Igros Kodesh vol. 4 p. 109

2. Ibid vol. 14 p. 278

3. Emphases are in the original.

4. Ibid vol. 27, from a response dated 11 Iyar 5731

5. Ibid vol. 4 p. 306

6. Ibid vol. 16 p. 347

7. Ibid vol. 16 p. 227