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בשבת



אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

PARSHAS
VAYEILECH

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS
RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN

MULTIFACETED SINS

In the beginning of our *Parshah*, Hashem informs Moshe that in the future the Jewish nation will sin egregiously and turn to other gods. However, they will come to realize their mistake, and recognize that their difficulties are due to their turning away from Hashem. Hashem then states, "And I will hide My face on that day, because they turned to other gods."¹

When the Jewish nation realizes they erred, Hashem responds that He will hide His face. What is the sense in that? Furthermore, Hashem had already stated that He will Hide his face in response to their turning to idolatry. How is this new response different than what Hashem is already doing?

The Ramban² explains that *Klal Yisrael* had thoughts of *Teshuvah*, but they did not complete the process. The second 'hiding' is Hashem waiting to bring the Redemption, waiting for the Jewish nation to completely turn around by taking the thoughts of *Teshuvah* and turning it into action.

What action is needed in the *Teshuvah* process? *Teshuvah* consists of three parts, a verbal declaration of the sin, a resolution to never sin again, and regret for past misdeeds.³ Of these three, R'Yisrael Salanter⁴ says that the resolution is the most difficult part. The Rambam writes that the resolution must be one where, "The One Who Knows the hidden can bear witness that the individual will *never* do that sin again."⁵ How can we possibly come close to such a standard?

Reb Yisrael presents a novel idea. If a person were faced with two disparate sins, and only repents for one, they are given full credit for that one. Similarly, says R'Yisrael, every category of sin has many levels, depending on the intensity and frequency of sin. Accordingly, if a person continues to sin, but not as often or as intense as before, they are given full credit for the difference between what they had done and what they do now. Therefore, we should take heart in knowing that every positive change is calculated on its own merits.

With this in mind, we can approach Yom Kippur with a renewed mindset. Instead of attempting to tackle the entire *Aveirah* at once, we can break it down into tolerable parts until we end up changing our old bad habits into powerful good habits.

1 *Devarim* 31:16-18

2 *Devarim* 31:17 s.v. ואמר ביום and *Devarim* 31:18 s.v. ואנכי הסתר

3 *Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah*, Chap 2

4 *Ohr Yisrael* Letter 6

5 *Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah* 2:2

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

We generally understand that our *Yetzer Horah* tempts us to do *Aveiros*. What some people don't recognize, though, is that the *Yetzer Horah* also attempts to get us to do *Mitzvos*!

Of course, in those instances, these *Mitzvos* can be detrimental to our spiritual health. For example, sometimes we feel energized and inspired, and we vow to ourselves that we will change. In our inspiration we make grandiose plans for our new life, which we know with certainty will come to fruition.

Alas, when we fall back into our old ways, we are devastated, and may even give up hope. "Why bother attempting, I'll only fail," we may think.

A person has to be vigilant, even when inspired to do good - is this truly the right thing for me at this time? It might be wiser to break our 'turn around' into parts. Yes, it's important to change, but lasting change will only happen if it is properly planned.

If a person wants to do lasting *Teshuvah*, take R'Yisrael's advice - focus on the easier layers of the *Aveirah* first, which will then lead to a total and complete *Teshuvah*.¹

1 *Ohr Yisrael* Letter 7

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I can't fathom how to acquire Ehrlichkeit and Yiras Shomayim without studying Mussar! Despite other religious trappings, without Mussar one can't acquire Yiras Shomayim." - Rav Elazar Mann Schach, *Teshuvah* address, 1986

THE SCIENCE OF TESHUVAH

Our brains are masters of habit - it's a blessing from Hashem that we don't need to relearn how to tie our shoes every time we want to go somewhere. Often, we teach our brains benign habits - how to ride a bicycle, hold a pencil, or walk upright. Sometimes we teach our brain good habits - washing our hands after waking in the morning, holding the door open for others, and so on. Unfortunately, there are times where we teach our brain bad habits. How do we undo those habits?

Though the *Teshuvah* process is a spiritual journey, there are many parallels within the secular universe. *Teshuvah* takes deep reflection, a desire to change, an action plan, and a shift in our worldview. Some of the techniques that are used in this process can be found in the techniques used to master new skills.

Joseph Weintraub, co-author of the book, *The Coaching Manager: Developing Top Talent in Business*, has this to say on developing new skills. "You can't take on everything. If you do, you'll never do it. Instead, choose one or two skills to focus on at a time, and break that skill down into manageable goals."

Additionally, he points out that new habits take time. "It's not going to happen overnight. It usually takes six months or more to develop a new skill."¹

As for the bad habits themselves, brain science² shows us that if a person refrains from something for a period of time, the neural network that he or she created becomes weaker, and eventually those neurons are used by the brain for something else. Thus, by focusing on creating new good habits, and refraining from our old bad habits, we then use the neural 'real estate' for our good habits, effectively wiping away the bad habits.

Human beings are complex, and *Teshuvah* is a complex process. The effects, though, are real and quite measurable.

***Teshuvah* takes deep reflection, a desire to change, an action plan, and a shift in our worldview.**

1 Gallo, Amy. "How to Master a New Skill." *Harvard Business Review*, 12 July 2016.

2 Doidge, Norman. *The Brain That Changes Itself*. CBC Learning, 2008, p. 123

DID YOU KNOW?

- The highest level of *Teshuvah* is to be in the same exact situation and not repeat the *Aveirah*.¹
- "My sons! Open for me the size of a pinhole in your *Teshuvah* and I will extend it to the size that would allow wagons and caravans to pass through!"²
- When Hashem accepts our *Teshuvah*, he doesn't simply forgive us for the act that we did, rather, He considers it as if the action never occurred in the first place.³

1 *Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah* 2:1

2 *Medrash Shir HaShirim* 5:2

3 *Mesillas Yesarim* Chapter 4