

The Hebrew text of Orot haTeshuvah may be found at <http://www.hebrewbooks.org/31307>

1. Introduction to Orot haTeshuvah

Teshuvah occupies the greatest portion of Torah and life, and upon it all personal and communal hopes are founded.

2. Talmud, Yoma 86b

אמר ריש לקיש גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו כשגגות שנאמר +הושע יד+ שובה ישראל עד ד' אלקיך כי כשלת בעונך הא עון מזיד הוא וקא קרי ליה מכשול איני והאמר ריש לקיש גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו כזכויות שנאמר +יחזקאל לג+ ובשוב רשע מרשעתו ועשה משפט וצדקה עליהם הוא יחיה לא קשיא כאן מאהבה כאן מיראה

Reish Lakish said: Teshuvah is great, for intentional sin becomes like accidental sin... But didn't Reish Lakish say Teshuvah is great for intentional sin becomes like merit?... One is teshuvah from love, the other is teshuvah from fear.

Teshuvah is about using sin to help us return to perfection

3. Talmud, Nedarim 39b

שבעה דברים נבראו קודם שנברא העולם אלו הן תורה ותשובה גן עדן וגיהנם כסא הכבוד ובית המקדש ושמו של משיח

Seven items were created before the universe: Torah, Teshuvah, Gan Eden, Gehennom, the Divine Throne, the Beit haMikdash and the name of Mashiach.

4. Orot haTeshuvah 11:4

The path of all existence is founded upon teshuvah. Entities come into existence as a descent from the Divine realm to worldly realms – a form of descent and of terrible “death” – to which no descent in this universe, from level to level, from great talent and acquisition to lesser talent and acquisition, can compare. This is engineered on the higher calculation of justice, which gauged the justice of existence before anything was created... But this descent has the foundation for greater ascent stored within... as it is written, “Before mountains were birthed and earth and foundation were formed, You have been Gd for all eternity. You laid man low, and declared, ‘Return, sons of men!’”

5. Orot haTeshuvah 7:4

Thoughts of teshuvah reveal the depth of one's desire, and the strength of the soul is revealed in all its glory through those thoughts. The greater the thoughts of teshuvah, the greater its liberation.

6. Orot haTeshuvah 6:2

Teshuvah always resides in the heart; it is stored in the heart even during the sin itself.

7. Orot haTeshuvah 15:3-4

Natural regret which burns in the heart is part of teshuvah, from the soul's pain at its stagnation rather than ascent, and all the more so if it feels descent within itself.

8. Orot haTeshuvah 8:3, 8:7

All sins cause the heart to grieve, for they demolish the unity of the individual person and the universe... Every ethical severing from that whole, whether from thoughts or deeds, individual traits or general balance, causes many small cuts which instigate great internal pain for all aspects of the soul...

9. Orot haTeshuvah 9:5

As part of the teshuvah process, one must define well the nature of good and bad, so that the regret and the stirring of his spirit from compulsion [to sin] toward resistance will affect only the bad, and not the good. Further, one must filter out the good that is found in the depths of bad, and strengthen the good via that energy with which he flees from the bad, so that teshuvah will function for the good, actually converting intentional sins into merits.

Converting the sins of the past into merits

10. Orot haTeshuvah 9:2

One's horizon broadens via teshuvah... and as a result of the greatness and length and breadth, height and depth of this penetrating view, Divine goodness and benevolence are revealed in their truth... The flaws seen in the order of life are recognized as creases which become straightened.

11. Orot haTeshuvah 8:13

Every sin introduces into the spirit unique anxiety, which departs only via teshuvah. The anxiety is converted to faith and courage in proportion to the depth of the teshuvah. One can recognize the imprint of that anxiety in the lines of a person's face, his movements, his voice, his conduct, his penmanship, his mode of speech, and especially his writing, his presentation and structuring of ideas. Wherever sin obstructs the light, there the flaw is visible, and according to the level of sin and its relevance to the subject at hand, so its impression is visible to those who gaze with lucid vision.

12. Orot haTeshuvah 9:8

Teshuvah converts the desire which has already been actualized in the [sinful] deed, which has already acquired the strength of the actual to the point that it broke the strength of ethics and faith. Once the Divine light shines well, and the will has been uprooted [from sin], it does not return to the void. Rather, it acts with its strength upon the foundation of the universe, to impress upon it a mighty will for light and good, and so intentional sin becomes actual merit.

Practical applications

13. Talmud, Avodah Zarah 17a

אמרו עליו על ר"א בן דורדיא שלא הניח זונה אחת בעולם שלא בא עליה פעם אחת שמע שיש זונה אחת בכרכי הים והיתה נוטלת כיס דינרין בשכרה נטל כיס דינרין והלך ועבר עליה שבעה נהרות בשעת הרגל דבר הפיחה אמרה כשם שהפיחה זו אינה חוזרת למקומה כך אלעזר בן דורדיא אין מקבלין אותו בתשובה הלך וישב בין שני הרים וגבעות אמר הרים וגבעות בקשו עלי רחמים

She said to him, 'Just as gas does not return to its source, so they will never accept Elazar ben Durdaya's repentance!' He went and sat between two hills, saying, 'Hills, pray for mercy on my behalf!'...

14. Talmud, Gittin 57a

מעשה ועמדו ארבעים מודיות בדינר נחסר השער מודיא אחת ובדקו ומצאו אב ובנו שבאו על נערה מאורסה ביום הכפורים והביאום לבית דין וסקלום וחזר השער למקומו

They checked and found a father and his son who had lived with a betrothed woman on Yom Kippur. They punished them in court, and the market rate returned to its former level.

15. Talmud, Yoma 69b

בעו רחמי ואמסר בידיהו אמר להו חזו דאי קטליתו ליה לההוא כליא עלמא חבשוהו תלתא יומי ובעו ביעתא בת יומא בכל ארץ ישראל ולא אשתכח

They davened, and the *yetzer* for immorality was turned over to them, with a warning: If you kill it, the world will be destroyed. They held it for three days, and then they could not find an egg in all of Israel when they sought one.

Even the thought of teshuvah matters

16. Talmud, Kiddushin 49b

על מנת שאני צדיק אפילו רשע גמור מקודשת שמא הרהר תשובה בדעתו

If a man says, "Marry me on condition that I am a tzaddik," then even if he is fully wicked, she is married; perhaps he had thoughts of teshuvah in his mind.

17. Orot haTeshuvah 5:6

Even if a person is disposed to stumble, to flaw his righteousness and ethical conduct, this does not flaw his perfection. The essence of his perfection is in his longing and desire to achieve perfection.

18. Orot haTeshuvah 8:6

One who feels within himself the depth of regret of teshuvah, and the exasperated desire in his thoughts to mend his flaws – those he is already capable of mending and those he is not yet capable of mending but for which he anticipates Divine mercy – can already count himself among the righteous.