

Teshuvah – It's not about sin

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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.

Teshuvah is not about sin correction, but about revealing perfection

2. 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.

3. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 8:5

א"ר סימון בשעה שבא הקב"ה לבראת את אדם הראשון, נעשו מלאכי השרת כיתים כיתים, וחבורות חבורות, מהם אומרים אל יברא, ומהם אומרים יברא, ה"ה"ד (תהלים פה) חסד ואמת נפגשו צדק ושלוש נשקו, חסד אומר יברא שהוא גומל חסדים, ואמת אומר אל יברא שכולו שקרים, צדק אומר יברא שהוא עושה צדקות, שלום אומר אל יברא דכוליה קטטה, מה עשה הקב"ה נטל אמת והשליכו לארץ ה"ה"ד (דניאל ח) ותשלך אמת ארצה, אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקב"ה רבון העולמים מה אתה מבזה תכסיס אלטיכסייה שלך, תעלה אמת מן הארץ, הדא הוא דכתיב (תהלים פה) אמת מארץ תצמח,

R' Simon said: When HaShem was going to create Adam, the angels formed groups. Some of them said he should not be created, some said he should be created... Chesed said he should be created for he performs acts of kindness, Truth said he should not be created for he is full of lies...

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 5:6*

The perfection of life comes specifically with its revelation in its basic nature. Since nature itself is not insightful and intelligent, sin is guaranteed; “There is no righteous person in the land who can do good, and not sin.” But nullification of the basic nature of one’s life, in order to be without sin, is itself the greatest sin – “He shall atone for the way he sinned against his life.” Teshuvah repairs the corrupt and returns the world and life to its source form, specifically with the revelation of its higher essence.

6. 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.

7. 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 כזכיות 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.

8. Orot haTeshuvah 9:5

As part of the teshuvah process... one must filter out the good that is found in the depths of bad, and strengthen it via that energy with which he flees from the bad. Teshuvah will then be a force for good, actually converting intentional sins into merits.

9. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 5

אמר הקב"ה תדשא הארץ וגו' עץ פרי מה הפרי נאכל אף העץ יהא נאכל, והיא לא עשת כן אלא ותוצא הארץ דשא עשב מזריע וגו' ועץ עושה פרי הפרי נאכל ואין העץ נאכל

HaShem said, "Let the ground bring forth... *eitz pri*" – Just as the fruit is edible, so the tree is edible. It did not do this. Instead, "And the ground brought forth... and *eitz oseh pri*" – the fruit is edible, the tree is not edible.

10. Orot haTeshuvah 6:7

The nature of the earth, the movement of the living [from its perfect source], the weakness of the spirit when it is enclosed in a physical frame, brought about the situation in which only the fruit, the final product, the lead ideal, would be sensed in its pleasantness and glory, but the wood which bears the fruit, which is necessary for developing the fruit, became coarse and material and lost its taste.

Perfection is always there; we need to develop it

11. 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.

12. Orot haTeshuvah 6:2

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

13. Orot haTeshuvah 11:1

Above it all is only good, flowing unobstructed, and all evil and ugliness never existed – in truth, it never was, is or will be, only the light of Gd and His goodness.

14. 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.

15. 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.

How this affects the way we do teshuvah: Practical points

16. Kohelet 7:20

There is no righteous person in the land who can do good, and not sin.

17. Orot haTeshuvah 14:36

When one wishes specifically to be a fully righteous person, it is difficult for him to be a *baal teshuvah*. Therefore, it is appropriate for a person to place within his heart the longing to be a *baal teshuvah*, immersed in the idea of teshuvah and longing for its actualization. Then his teshuvah will be able to elevate him to the level of fully righteous people, and beyond.

18. Midrash, Petichta Eichah 2

כתיב (ירמיה ט"ז) ואותי עזבו ואת תורתי לא שמרו, הלואי אותי עזבו ותורתי שמרו, מתוך שהיו מתעסקין בה המאור שבה היה מחזירן למוטב

It is written (Yirmiyah 16), 'They abandoned Me and they did not guard My Torah.' Would that they had abandoned Me but observed My Torah! Through their involvement in Torah, its light would have restored them to goodness.

19. Orot haTeshuvah 10:1

Full teshuvah truly requires higher vision... which is impossible except via involvement in the depth of Torah and Divine wisdom, in the secrets of the universe. This also requires a clean body and purity of one's traits as assistants, lest clouds of desire obscure the radiance of his intellect, but the first manifestation must be that of Torah.

20. Orot haTeshuvah 15:2

Pure righteousness dictates that all work in *madda* be geared toward the ideological goal of guiding human desire to the pure form that is appropriate for it... Woe to mankind when it strays from righteousness, and instead of establishing perfection upon the foundation of elevating our desires, it leaves our desires in their coarse form.

21. Talmud, Kiddushin 49b

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.

22. 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.

23. Orot haTeshuvah 13:9*

At first he should not make mending of the past such an essential element, for if he will immediately try to repair the past, he will find many obstacles.

24. Orot haTeshuvah 14:19

Even if one sees that along with his arousal to grasp the straight path and strengthen himself in service of Gd, the yetzer hara is also strengthened and it makes him descend into desire and lowness, he should not regret his rising. He should re-double his efforts, and as far as the stumbling blocks which came into his path of ascent, he should do teshuvah and know that all of it is included in the category of error in pursuit of a mitzvah, for which one need not bring a *korban chatat*.

Conquer the fear

25. Orot haTeshuvah 8:4

Wickedness, which resides in the depths of the soul when one does not desire to abandon it, destroys life's equilibrium, the just connection between one's soul and all that exists, the universe in its greater and lesser parts. Destruction of that harmony causes great pains, and when it penetrates to one's spirit then it causes great suffering, in the form of trembling, anger and chutzpah of shame and hopelessness.

26. Orot haTeshuvah 16:2-3

The *baal teshuvah* fears that his sins have already destroyed him and his hope is already lost, and he knows not that within his fear all of the light of his salvation is already stored. The earth was also afraid and it did not produce trees in their true form, their taste like that of the fruit. The moon feared the competition of two kings with one crown. Humanity fears the clear and lofty levels of its freedom...

But one cannot even gauge and appraise the greatness of the fulfillment one must feel, with great satisfaction, because of the gentle pain which aches him when the holy and pure spirit of teshuvah is manifest upon him.