

Texts from Maimonides Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah

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Chapter Two

Halacha 1

[Who has reached] complete *teshuvah*? A person who confronts the same situation in which he sinned when he has the potential to commit [the sin again], and, nevertheless, abstains and does not commit it because of his *teshuvah* alone and not because of fear or a lack of strength.

For example, a person engaged in illicit sexual relations with a woman. Afterwards, they met in privacy, in the same country, while his love for her and physical power still persisted, and nevertheless, he abstained and did not transgress. This is a complete *ba'al-teshuvah*. This was implied by King Solomon in his statement [Ecclesiastes 12:1] "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, [before the bad days come and the years draw near when you will say: 'I have no desire for them.'"

If he does not repent until his old age, at a time when he is incapable of doing what he did before, even though this is not a high level of repentance, he is a *ba'al-teshuvah*.

Even if he transgressed throughout his entire life and repented on the day of his death and died in repentance, all his sins are forgiven as [Ecclesiastes, op. cit.:2] continues: "Before the sun, the light, the moon, or the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain..." - This refers to the day of death. Thus, we can infer that if one remembers his Creator and repents before he dies, he is forgiven.

Halacha 2

What constitutes *teshuvah*? That a sinner should abandon his sins and remove them from his thoughts, resolving in his heart, never to commit them again as [Isaiah 55:7] states "May the wicked abandon his ways..." Similarly, he must regret the past as [Jeremiah 31:18] states: "After I returned, I regretted."

[He must reach the level where] He who knows the hidden will testify concerning him that he will never return to this sin again as [Hosea 14:4] states: "We will no longer say to the work of our hands: 'You are our gods.'"

He must verbally confess and state these matters which he resolved in his heart.

Halacha 3

Anyone who verbalizes his confession without resolving in his heart to abandon [sin] can be compared to [a person] who immerses himself [in a *mikvah*] while [holding the carcass of] a lizard in his hand. His immersion will not be of avail until he casts away the carcass.

This principle is implied by the statement, [Proverbs 28:13], "He who confesses and forsakes [his sins] will be treated with mercy."

It is necessary to mention particularly one's sins as evidenced by [Moses' confession, Exodus 32:31]: "I appeal to You. The people have committed a terrible sin by making a golden idol."

Halacha 4

Among the paths of repentance is for the penitent to

- a) constantly call out before God, crying and entreating;
- b) to perform charity according to his potential;
- c) to separate himself far from the object of his sin;
- d) to change his name, as if to say "I am a different person and not the same one who sinned;"
- e) to change his behavior in its entirety to the good and the path of righteousness; and
- f) to travel in exile from his home. Exile atones for sin because it causes a person to be submissive, humble, and meek of spirit.

Halacha 7

Yom Kippur is the time of *teshuvah* for all, both individuals and the community at large. It is the apex of forgiveness and pardon for Israel. Accordingly, everyone is obligated to repent and confess on Yom Kippur.

The mitzvah of the confession of Yom Kippur begins on the day's eve, before one eats [the final meal], lest one choke to death in the meal before confessing.

Although a person confessed before eating, he should confess again in the evening service, Yom Kippur night, and similarly, repeat the confession in the morning, *Musaf*, afternoon, and *Ne'ilah* services...

Halacha 9

Teshuvah and Yom Kippur only atone for sins between man and God; for example, a person who ate a forbidden food or engaged in forbidden sexual relations, and the like. However, sins between man and man; for example, someone who injures a colleague, curses a colleague, steals from him, or the like will never be forgiven until he gives his colleague what he owes him and appeases him.

[It must be emphasized that] even if a person restores the money that he owes [the person he wronged], he must appease him and ask him to forgive him.

Even if a person only upset a colleague by saying [certain] things, he must appease him and approach him [repeatedly] until he forgives him.

If his colleague does not desire to forgive him, he should bring a group of three of his friends and approach him with them and request [forgiveness]. If [the wronged party] is not appeased, he should repeat the process a second and third time. If he [still] does not want [to forgive him], he may let him alone and need not pursue [the matter further]. On the contrary, the person who refuses to grant forgiveness is the one considered as the sinner.

[The above does not apply] if [the wronged party] was one's teacher. [In that instance,] a person should continue seeking his forgiveness, even a thousand times, until he forgives him.

Halacha 10

It is forbidden for a person to be cruel and refuse to be appeased. Rather, he should be easily pacified, but hard to anger. When the person who wronged him asks for forgiveness, he should forgive him with a complete heart and a willing spirit. Even if he aggravated and wronged him severely, he should not seek revenge or bear a grudge.

This is the path of the seed of Israel and their upright spirit. In contrast, the insensitive gentiles do not act in this manner. Rather, their wrath is preserved forever. Similarly, because the Gibeonites did not forgive and refused to be appeased, [II Samuel 21:2] describes them, as follows: "The Gibeonites are not among the children of Israel."

Halacha 11

If a person wronged a colleague and the latter died before he could ask him for forgiveness, he should take ten people and say the following while they are standing before the colleague's grave: "I sinned against God, the Lord of Israel, and against this person by doing the following to him...."

If he owed him money, he should return it to his heirs. If he is unaware of the identity of his heirs, he should place [the sum] in [the hands of] the court and confess.

Chapter Three

Halacha 4

Even though the sounding of the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah is a decree, it contains an allusion. It is as if [the *shofar's* call] is saying:

Wake up you sleepy ones from your sleep and you who slumber, arise. Inspect your deeds, repent, remember your Creator. Those who forget the truth in the vanities of time and throughout the entire year, devote their energies to vanity and emptiness which will not benefit or save: Look to your souls. Improve your ways and your deeds and let every one of you abandon his evil path and thoughts.

Accordingly, throughout the entire year, a person should always look at himself as equally balanced between merit and sin and the world as equally balanced between merit

and sin. If he performs one sin, he tips his balance and that of the entire world to the side of guilt and brings destruction upon himself.

[On the other hand,] if he performs one *mitzvah*, he tips his balance and that of the entire world to the side of merit and brings deliverance and salvation to himself and others. This is implied by [Proverbs 10:25] "A righteous man is the foundation of the world," i.e., he who acted righteously, tipped the balance of the entire world to merit and saved it.

For these reasons, it is customary for all of Israel to give profusely to charity, perform many good deeds, and be occupied with *mitzvot* from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur to a greater extent than during the remainder of the year.

During these ten days, the custom is for everyone to rise [while it is still] night and pray in the synagogues with heart-rending words of supplication until daybreak.