

A Whole Heart

Chassidut discusses three levels of *teshuvah* (return to God) – one higher than the next:

The first level is a change to a lifestyle of observance of the *mitzvot*. In the words of the Tanya, **“He must resolve in perfect sincerity never again to revert to folly, to rebel against God’s rule; he will never again violate the King’s command, God forbid, neither a positive command nor a prohibition.”** (Tanya Igeret Hateshuva 1). The emphasis in this level of *teshuvah* is not only rectification of actual deeds – down to the finest details – but also full acceptance of the yoke of Heaven, experienced as standing as a servant before God, the King. This is a description of the experience of prayer. Accepting the yoke of Heaven is expressed by praying three times a day at the prescribed times. Even more than the ritual prayers, accepting the yoke of Heaven includes constant prayer - stemming from a feeling of being dependent on God – and faith in God’s Divine Providence.

The second level of *teshuvah* is a complete transition to a Torah perspective of the world and in-depth study and application of the Torah in life. The objective is to view reality through the eyes of the Torah and by doing so, to illuminate the world and fill it with the goodness of the “Torah of light.”

The third level of *teshuva* is concealed in the depths of the heart, beyond the revealed dimension of Torah and *mitzvah* observance in our incomplete and limited reality. This level reveals the essential wholeness of the soul, its purity and oneness with God.

On the surface, these seem to be three successive levels of *teshuvah*: Obviously, a person has to change his lifestyle and to make prayer a way of life. Later, as he acquires a Torah outlook, he can broaden his knowledge of Torah and in particular – deepen it continuously – and he will become a lighthouse that illuminates his surroundings. Only after he has rectified his

lifestyle and his worldview, can he turn to more subtle and concealed areas in his soul – to deep *teshuvah* that is not at all connected to sins but rather, to the descent of the soul into this world.

In truth, however – and certainly in our era – the order is just the opposite. The inner, concealed movement toward *teshuvah*, the heart's aspiration for perfection, motivates the comprehensive change in a person's life. It urges him to devote himself to the Torah and to immerse himself in a life of Torah, *mitzvahs* and accepting the yoke of Heaven in his daily life – down to the finest details.

Thus, explains the Alter Rebbe in *Igeret Hateshuvah* in the Tanya, in order to access “the beginning of the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* and its primary objective – “to return to God in truth and with a whole heart” – it is vital that from its very inception, the soul touches the secret depth of *teshuvah* – complete *teshuvah* motivated by love and joy. (The Zohar refers to this *teshuvah* as *teshuvah ila'ah* – higher *teshuvah*). This higher *teshuvah* is the *teshuvah* of the whole heart. It is *teshuvah* that flows forth from the aspiration for perfection that is concealed in the heart, the will to ascend from the conflicted partialness of reality to which the soul has descended. It is only this type of *teshuvah* that ultimately brings peace and wholeness in our lives.

This aspiration for wholeness is expressed in our demand for truth: “There is no truth other than Torah, “– and in a devoted quest to achieve the truth – the entire truth (acquired by a breadth of Torah knowledge) and only the truth (acquired through focused study of the Torah) – with no compromise or stopping on the way. Whole *teshuvah* lifts us above and beyond our personal deed-rectification (the *teshuvah* of the *Shulchan Aruch*, Code of Jewish Law) to *teshuvah* that reaches until God. This *teshuvah* focuses on the King, Himself. It demands the fulfillment of all His *mitzvahs* and experiences them as reaching out to God. Prayer is the inner soul of reaching out to God.