



THE EASY WAY TO BECOME A TZADDIK!

BE ON GUARD IN THE ASERES YEMEI TESHUVAH

We are in the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, and most people are challenged by the *yetzer hara* about what *teshuvah* is, and how it works. You realize that the greatest challenge to the *yetzer hara* is *teshuvah*. To the *yetzer hara*, the most ‘feared’ tool that Hashem gave us is *teshuvah*. The *gemara* (Bava Basra 16a) says, the job of the *yetzer hara* is *יורד ומתעה*, for him to come down here and make us go off the *derech*. Then, *עולה ומרגיז*, to go up there and make a fuss. Whenever you make a mistake, you do an *aveirah*, the *yetzer hara* goes up there and screams, “Hashem! Reuven! Shimon! *Oy vey*.” Then *נוטל נשמה*, he asks Hashem for *reshus*, he ultimately takes the person’s *neshamah*.

The *gemara* (Shabbos 105b) says the *umnus*, the craft of the *yetzer hara* is *היום אומר לו עשה כך*, today he tells you to do this, *ולמחר* the next day he tells you to do something else, *עד שאומר לו עבוד עבודה זרה*, until he gets a person to do *avodah zarah*.¹

So if you think about it, there is no greater enemy of the *yetzer hara* than *teshuvah*. That’s why, as you’ll notice, even though today is the second day after Rosh Hashanah, it looks like it’s in the middle of the summer, or it’s in the middle of *bein hazmanim* already. Many people are tired. They got their first cold of the season. They feel just weary from the whole Yom Tov. But trust me, they’ll get a lot of *kochos* shortly. As soon as Yom Kippur is over, when they hear that last Shema Yisrael, they are going to become full of *koach*. All their headaches will disappear. All their colds will be gone like yesterday’s snow. They’ll be raring to go. They’re going to wonder, “I wonder what happened?”

Now, let’s say someone just happens to be in the mood and he thinks, “How could I do *teshuvah*? I’ve done *teshuvah* for how many years? 8 years, 9 years.” So a person starts to think, “My *teshuvah* last year didn’t work. What’s going to be with me? Is there any hope for me?”

MISTAKEN UNDERSTANDING OF TESHUVAH

I want to tell you what the biggest mistake that people make when they think about *teshuvah* is. People think that *teshuvah* is correcting your actions, *tikun hamaasim*. There is nothing further from the truth! You have to know, even *teshuvah sheleimah* has nothing to do with *tikun hamaasim*. You’re not going to change your *maasim* when you say, “*Hachazireinu biteshuvah sheleimah lefanecha*.”

You have to know another mistake that people make when they want to do *teshuvah*. People think that *teshuvah* brings *mehilas avonos*. It has very little to do with *mehilas avonos*. As a matter of fact, you could be *mekayem* the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* without getting any *mehilas avonos*.

Hashem told this to us in the Torah. In the Torah in last week’s *parshah* (Devarim 30:11-14) it says: *כי המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוך*... *היום לא נפלאת הוא ממך ולא רחקה הוא... לא בשמים הוא... כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיך ובלבבך לעשותו*. Hashem doesn’t exaggerate. So if Hashem tells you *קרוב אליך הדבר מאד*, that means it is very, very easy to do *teshuvah*. But that’s one thing the *yetzer hara* doesn’t want you to know about. You know why? He would love for you not to do *teshuvah*.

But what does *teshuvah* do for a person? What is the purpose of *teshuvah*?

The purpose of *teshuvah* is to take a person who is in the status of being a *rasha* and turn him into a *tzaddik*. And that’s the easiest thing possible. It can be done in one second!

Did you ever wonder why we do *teshuvah*? We say *tachanun* in the morning, *tachanun* in the afternoon. We bang ourselves *ashamnu, bagadnu*. What’s it all about? What kind of *teshuvah* is that?

You have to know one thing. There is one subject called *kaparas avonos*, getting the sins wiped off. That’s a process. Getting *kaparah* for your *avonos* is something that involves the whole process. But to do *teshuvah* and become a *tzaddik* is as easy as ABC. The *emes* is, you should train yourself after hearing this *shmuz* to do *teshuvah* a hundred times a day.

Every time you do a *cheit*, you know what happens? What happens if a person sat down with his friend and he said, “I want to tell you something. Did you hear the latest hock? The *rebbe* is blackmailing us.” *Rechilus, motzi shem ra, zilzul morim*. A serious *cheit*. A big, big *cheit*. Nu, how do you do *teshuvah* on that? It’s very simple.

What happens when you do that? You now acquired yourself a *shem* of being a *rasha*. That’s all. You become a *rasha*. That’s what happened. In Hashem’s eyes now, you’re viewed as a *rasha*. Any time you sit down and you hock *lashon hara* with somebody, you are a *rasha*. If you do it with brazenness, you are a *rasha gamur*, you are a *mechutzafdiqe rasha*.

¹ והתנאי, רבי שמעון בן אלקעזר אומר משום חילפא בר אגרא שאמר משום רבי יוחנן בן נורי: המקרה בגדיו בחמתו, והמשבר כליו בחמתו, והמפזר מעותיו בחמתו, 'הא בעיניך קעובד עבודה זרה. שפך אומנותו של יצר הרע: היום אומר לו עשה כך, ולמחר אומר לו עשה כך, עד שאומר לו עבוד עבודה זרה והולך ועובד. אמר רבי אבין: מאי קראה — 'לא יהיה בך אל זר ולא תשתתחן לאל נכר', איזהו אל זר שיש בגופו של אדם? הוי אומר, זה יצר הרע.

What happens if you do *teshuvah*? You become a *tzaddik*. You didn't wipe anything away. Wiping away is a whole different story. *Teshuvah* means you become a *tzaddik*.

You have to know that being a *tzaddik v'rasha* has nothing to do with *kaparah*, it has nothing to do with wiping away the *aveiros*, whatsoever. There are certain severe *aveiros* that a person does for which he can't get *kaparah* no matter what kind of *teshuvah* he does. He has to come onto other things. But if a person has regrets and he's *shav*, and he returns, he's a *tzaddik* in Hashem's eyes, regardless of *kaparah*. The Minchas Chinuch (Mitzva 364) says this and writes, כן נראה פשוט. It's very simple, it's like this.²

In other words, it's possible for a person to do *aveiros* and then do *teshuvah* and become a *tzaddik gamur* even though he has no *kaparah* his sins, because *kaparah* is a whole different *sugya*. To wipe away something is a whole process. To clean up the mess, that's a process. But to become a *tzaddik*, it's like this (snapping fingers). Is that difficult? No. כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאוד. But the *yetzer hara* tells you, "You can't do *teshuvah*."

CHINUCH ABOUT DOING TESHUVAH

We're so not trained to do *teshuvah* in our lives! The one thing we don't tell kids is to do *teshuvah*. We teach kids about *aveiros*. We never tell kids about *teshuvah*. There is no *chinuch* for *teshuvah*.

Let's say a kid turns on a light on Shabbos. The father says, "Don't touch the light!" The kid says, "No," and puts it on. If the father is a gentle fellow, he takes the kid and puts him in the room. If he's less gentle, he takes it as a personal affront – "I just told you not to do it" – and he gives him a frisk. Or whatever else, depending on the kid's age. But we never tell the kid, "Do *teshuvah*." If you don't see these moments as opportunities, you are never going to *mechanech* your kid to do *teshuvah*.

CHANGING YOURSELF IN A SPLIT SECOND

Now, you have to understand, if *teshuvah* is so simple, why don't we do it all the time? You have to know the first step in *teshuvah* is the awareness that you're carrying all of your *aveiros*, all of the *chataim*, wagonsfull – forget about wagons – truckloads, 18-wheelers full of *aveiros*! Some people carry little trucks of *aveiros*, some big trucks.

You have to know, even when you're carrying all your *chataim*, and you are sitting in the cab of your truckload of *aveiros*, the moment you say, "Hashem, I'm doing *teshuvah*," you're not a *rasha* anymore! Even though you have all those *aveiros* that are in the back that you're *shlepping* along with you, you are still considered a ba'al *teshuvah* and a *tzaddik*.

Where does this idea come from? This is, like, wild stuff! We learn it from the following gemara in Kiddushin (49b).

Imagine there was a guy who just came out of a house of idol worship and he just did *avodah zarah*. He just worshiped *avodah zarah*. And he went and did some *arayus gamur mid'oiraisa*, he was *megaleh arayus*. And he comes out, he's strutting down the street. He puts on a little *yarmulka* on his head, *lezecher yahaduso*. He goes over to a girl in the street and he says, "You know, you look like you'd make a good wife." She says, "No, I'm a *frum* girl." He says, "I would love to marry you." She says, "Well, we'll see." Then she says to him, "But you're a *rasha*. I can't marry such a *rasha*." And he says, "But if not for that, you would have no problem marrying me?" "Maybe, maybe." She gives him a *pesach*, an opening.

The guy calls two *eidim* over, two *yiddelach* who are walking by. He says, "Excuse me, *rabbosai, kimpt aher*." The guy is standing there and he says, "*Harei at mekudeshes li al menas she'ani tzaddik gamur*."

The *gemara* says, even if the guy was a *rasha gamur*, she is *mekudeshes*. The *gemara* says - *mekudeshes*. The Rambam says - *mekudeshes*. You know why she's *mekudeshes*? The *gemara* says: שמא הררה תשובה בדעתו, maybe he had a *hirhur teshuvah*. And if he had a *hirhur teshuvah*, is he still a *rasha gamur*? He's not. If he had a *hirhur teshuvah*, he's a *tzaddik gamur* now! This is mind bogging!

In that second, this *shlechte mentch*, in that second, he turned around. But what kind of *teshuvah* did he do? The answer is, *teshuvah gemurah*.

Shteit in this *gemara mefurash* that even when a person has no *kaparas avonos* and he's still carrying all his sins with him and will have to pay for every one of them - but *teshuvah* has nothing to do with that. He has the status of a *tzaddik gamur* if he did *ikar teshuvah*.

The Chofetz Chaim talks about this. Everyone should know this *chiddush* from the Chofetz Chaim. He says, a guy came to him and he said to him, "How could I *daven* for the *amud*? I feel like *aza rasha*. I talk *lashon hara*, I say all kinds of things. How could I go *daven* for the *amud* afterwards? It's not *shayach*."

The Chofetz Chaim told him, "Do *teshuvah*, what's the big deal? Be *marbeh teshuvah*." A whole *perek*, the Chofetz Chaim writes regarding this idea.

You understand, it makes no difference if you saw him do a *maaseh rishus* a second ago. It doesn't make any difference. A second later, he's a *tzaddik gamur*. You see how easy it is to become a *tzaddik gamur*. You walk around like you're carrying the world on your shoulders. You could be a *tzaddik gamur*.

² ונראה דלא ק' אם נאמר דאינו מתכפר בלא ידיו דברים מהא דאמרי' בקידושין אפילו רשע גמור אמרינן שמא הררה תשובה בלבו והוי צדיק כמו שהקשינו לעיל דבאמת צדיק ורשע אינו תלוי בכפרה כלל דהא יש עבירות חמורות דאין מתכפר בתשובה כמבואר לקמן ומכל מקום כיון שמתחרט ושב הוי צדיק ה"נ נהי דאין לו כפרה בתשובה בלב מכל מקום הוי צדיק כיון שמתחרט לפני קונו ית' ואינו תלוי בכפרה כלל כ"פ.

We're talking about a guy who could be *chayav malkus*, *chayav misah*. It could be that there are *eidim* against him. He is a *tzaddik gamur*. Nu, so why don't you do *teshuvah*?³ (Chofetz Chaim mentioned above)

So the question is, what *be'emes* is *teshuvah*? What is the *teshuvah* that you do in one second? What kind of value could that *teshuvah* have? A big value, *rabbosai*. The Torah says בפיך ובלבבך. The *gemara* is *mechadesh* a *gevaldige chiddush*, that even without the *beficha*, with *bilvavcha* alone, you could become a *tzaddik*. If you were *taka meharher*. In the *passuk* it says *beficha* and *bilvavcha*. The *gemara* says, no, it's *beficha* or *bilvavcha*. Even *bilvavcha* is enough.

So let's understand something. What is the dynamic of a sin?

ANALYSIS OF A SIN

Let's say a person sits down with his friends and says *lashon hara*, he says some *lashon hara* about the *rebbe*. He says, "Everybody talks *lashon hara* about the *rebbe*, it's fine, that's not what Hashem is talking about." But the Chofetz Chaim says clearly, you can't talk *lashon hara* about your rebbeim. So what do you do then? What is going on in the person's mind who utters those words out of his mouth? You know what he's saying? A simple thing.

He's saying, "Hashem, right now, I'm not going to listen to You. I can't follow Your *tzivui*. I can't do what You want." You may be a nice fellow and say to Hashem, "I'm sorry" and "I hope You forgive me, but I've got to talk a little *lashon hara* now." That's nice. You acknowledge there is a Hashem and then you 'throw Him under the bus.'

Imagine you tell your son not to do something. He says, "Ta, I'm very sorry. I hate to do this to you, but I've got to do what I've got to do." He blows you out of the water and he does it anyway. "But I'm your father," you say to him. What is the answer? "Sorry, I'm not the son that you thought I was." That's what he's telling you. "You thought I was a son that was close to you. You thought I was somebody that was willing to listen to you." "But I've given you so much. I give you so much." "That's not the point."

The *ma'aseh aveirah* says to Hashem, "I'm being *merachek* myself from You. I'm creating a distance. You told me not to use my mouth for bad things? Sorry. You told me not to go somewhere. You told me not to be *mevatel* Torah? Very nice, but I can't do it."

Everything that happens to a person who does that is a result of his distancing himself from Hashem. Talk to children who are going off the *derech*, you tell them, "How can you do this?" You know what they answer you? It's a *pele* what they answer you. Sometimes they say, "I'm sorry, I've got to do what makes me happy." You tell them, "But do you realize, you're pulling away from the family, pulling away from *Yiddishkeit*, from the whole Am Yisrael?" They answer, "I've got to do what I've got to do." And they pull away. That's what happens.

Teshuvah means, "Hashem, I want to come back. I acknowledge I distanced myself. I want to come back."

That's the easiest thing to do if you want to come back. The *yesod* of a *hirhur teshuvah* is the simple *ratzon* to come back.

A REAL-LIFE TESHUVAH STORY

I was just reading a heartbreaking story about a girl from a chassidische *mishpacha*, a Gerrer family in Yerushalayim. At some point in her life, when she was around 17, she decided that she had to distance herself from her family. So the bus driver who used to drive the girls to school was nice to her and he asked her to meet. She later got engaged to him. The guy was from a completely secular background, not only that, he was so clueless about *Yiddishkeit*, he didn't know from any *mitzvos* whatsoever. The guy didn't grow up with one *mitzvah*. Not Yom Kippur. Not Rosh Hashanah. And she was a chassidische girl from Ger. Ger is a *chassidus* that has many values and *minhagim*.

She married the guy. She broke her family's heart; her mother's, father's, brothers', sisters' and all her extended family. She pulled away from them.

Then she writes, when she had kids she saw her husband was a *bor reik*, and empty pit. Not *stam*. The only thing he wanted to do was to play soccer. That was his dream for himself and for his kids. He spent the whole Shabbos playing soccer. They had a kid and he was '*mechanech*' him to soccer.

³ אחד שאלתי, אמת הוא מה שאחז"ל על הפסוק (תהלים נ"ח) האמנם אלם, מה אומנתו של אדם בעוה"ז שיש עצמו כאלם, אבל אי אפשר לי לפעול בעצמי הדבר הזה משום שקשה לי להזהר, וא"כ איך הנני ניצב בתפילתי לפני הקב"ה כיון שפי מלא מדברים בטלים ולשה"ר ושאר דיבורים אסורים ואיך אראה לפני מלך המלכים הקב"ה ולדבר עמו. והשבתי לו, הנה ידוע מה שאמר הכתוב (קהלת י') אם רוח המושל יעלה עליך מקומך אל תנח. וביאורו, המושל זה היצה"ר, והזהירונו בזה אף שהיצה"ר מתגבר על האדם כמה וכמה פעמים, אל יאמר האדם מה כוחי כי אלחם עם יצרי כי הנני רואה כי הוא מתגבר עלי ואין בכוחי לצאת אתו למערכת המלחמה. ובזה מייאש עצמו לגמרי מלהתגבר על יצרו, ויפקיר עצמו לדבר עבירה שיהיה דיבורו אצלו הפקר, וילך אחר עצת יצרו הרע, ידע האדם כי בנפשו הוא, וסכנה צפויה לו (ועיין בשערי תשובה לר"י שער א' מאמר ו') וכמאמר החכם (קהלת שם) כי מרפא יניח חטאים גדולים, וסוף סוף יטבע ביון מצולה של עבירות עד שיהיה אי אפשר לו לנקות עצמו מהם. וידוע מה שאחז"ל כל המחליט עצמו לדבר עבירה אין לו מחילה עולמית, היינו אפילו בשעת עת רצון, בשעה שמוחליל לו לאדם על עונותיו לא מחלו לו על מה שהחליט את עצמו לעבירה זו או לעבירה אחרת אך צריך האדם לאזור כל מאמצי כחו וילחם בכל עוז נגד יצרו, פעמים ינצחון היצה"ר, ופעמים יהיה הוא המנצח שיתגבר על יצרו, וסוף הדבר יהיה שיתגבר עליו ויגרשנו כולו מלבנו, וכמו שאחז"ל כל הבא לטהר מסייעין לו, דכיון שיבא בעצמו להיטהר מחלאת עונותיו יסייע לו מן השמים, ואזי תהיה ידו על העליונה. וזה שאמר הכתוב מקומך אל תנח, פי' לא תרד ממדרגתך וכדאיתא בגמ' (קידושין מ') שיראה אדם עצמו כאילו חציו זכאי וחציו חייב, עשה מצוה אחת אשריו שהכריע עצמו לכף זכות עבר עבירה אחת או לו שהכריע עצמו לכף חוב, וזה שאמר מקומך אל תנח, ר"ל חזק עצמך שער התורה פרק א' בהגה). ומובטחני שבאם תעשה כדבר הזה פעמים אחדות, לא יהיה קשה לך הדבר הזה, כשתתחרט למשל קודם תפלת המנחה, אז כמובן בין מנחה למעריב כבר תזהר בנפשך מדיבורים אסורים, ויעיל לך גם לאיזה שעות אחר תפלת מעריב בכח חרטה הראשונה של מנחה, והסוף יהיה שתרגיל עצמך לאט לאט להזהר מדיבורים אסורים עד שלא יהיה קשה לך לפרוש לגמרי מדיבורים אסורים. והנה אנו אומרים באבינו מלכנו סתום פיות משטינינו ומקטריגינו, והנה איך נוכל לבקש מה הקב"ה שיסתום פיות מקטריגינו, והלא אנו בעצמנו מעוררים את כח המקטרג במה שאנו מדברים דברי גנות על חבירינו, על כן מקודם צריכים אנו להיזהר בעצמנו שלא לדבר דיבורים אסורים ואז נוכל לבקש בדין שיסתום פיות מקטריגינו, ואחז"ל על מי העולם קיים, על מי שבולם פיו בשעת מריבה, ואז מדמה בודאי יסתום הקב"ה פי המקטרגים. כללו של דבר, האיש הנבון יראה למעט בדיבורו בכל מה דאפשר, וכן אחז"ל באבות: וכל המרבה דברים מביא חמא. ומצינו בעניני העולם הזה שאם ירצה אדם לשלוח דפעתשע אזי ממעט בתיבות בכל מה דאפשר, כי על כל תיבה ותיבה ישלם דמים הרבה, כן הדבר בענינינו, וכמו שאחז"ל על הפסוק ומגיד לאדם מה שיחיו אפילו שיחה קלה מגידין לו לאדם בשעת הדין (חפץ חיים, ס' זכור למרים פ' כ"ד)

One year on Purim, she wanted to show her kids what a real Purim was. They lived in a modern neighborhood in Yerushalayim. So she took them to the more *charedi* neighborhood. She wanted to show them where she lived. “This is the area where I lived,” she said. She showed them the house. She showed them the kids in the street, the *mishloach manos*, kids all dressed up. It’s *lebedig*. In the *frum* neighborhoods in Yerushalayim, Purim is on the street. She took them into her house, she said, “This is the house where I lived.” She showed her *kinderlach* what a real Purim looked like. And she wanted to come back. She was desperate to come back.

She called the house and her mother answered the phone. Her mother spoke to her from time to time. Her mother kept the lines open, there was some communication. Her father didn’t want to come to the phone. She said, “I want to talk to Tatty.” She started to scream and cry, “I want to come back, I want you to let me in. I want my kids to see where I came from.” The father was torn. He said, “Okay, let her come back.”

I said to myself, “That was the real thing! That’s *teshuvah*!” First, this girl said, “I want to go away. I want to live my own life. I have my own personal needs and I’m willing to be *merachek* myself from You, Hashem I can’t think of You. I can only think of myself.” Then, years later, she started doing *teshuvah*.

For her husband – they brought a speaker from Arachim to come to their house and speak to him and the family. This empty *bor reik* was listening and at the end of his *drashah* – a personal little thing – he grabbed his wife’s hand and said, “Could he come back next week?” The speaker came back the following week.

Today, the guy is sitting and learning Torah all day long! They moved to Beit Shemesh. She is already 100% *frum*. She works for Arachim. Now she is a big speaker and she works with all these kids that go off the *derech*. That’s her specialty.

Helping others brings *kaparah*. Her kids are in frum schools. Her oldest son is having a hard time. There is no soccer in the yeshivos.

It was a heartrending story. I read it right before I went to sleep and *mamash* the whole night, I was tossing back and forth.

But that’s what we do with Hashem. Every time we do an *aveirah*, we tell Hashem, “You know what, Hashem? Sorry. I’ve got to do what I’ve got to do. I’m going to be *merachek* myself.” For all the *chillul Shabbos*, for all the *treifos* she ate, for all the *aveiros* this person lived...My heart goes out for her, because now she became close. She is a *tzaddik gamur* today. She became a *tzaddeikes gemurah* the second she told Hashem, “I want to come back.”

DUMP YOUR BAGGAGE THREE TIMES A DAY

This stage of teshuva, the state of coming back to Hashem, is way before you are *mesaken* and correct the past. Correcting the past is the next challenge. That’s where you have to dump the baggage. If you want to lighten the load on the 18-wheeler, or lighten the load on the truck and eventually disconnect the back from the front so it shouldn’t have any connection to you - that takes a lot of work.

Every day we say this in *Shemoneh Esrei*, three times a day, השיבו אבינו לתורתך, “Return us, Our Father, to Your Torah.” That is *teshuvah*. If you’re not sure, look in the Artscroll *siddur* or some other *siddurim*. They have printed on top of it “*Teshuvah*.” You think, where is the *teshuvah*? השיבו אבינו לתורתך, that’s *teshuvah*? Yes. That’s *teshuvah*, rabbosai.

If you think, “Hashem, I mean it. I would like to come back to you. I’m sorry,” you just did teshuva! In one second, in the middle of *Shemoneh Esrei*. It could be that when you started davening, you were a *rasha gamur*. They were *torfin teflosecha*, Hashem was tearing up your *tefilos*. And now, השיבו ה', I want to come back, Hashem. וקרבנו מלכנו לעבודתך, “Tatty, I want to come home. I’m sorry I distanced myself.”

Then the next *brachah* is סלח לנו אבינו, “Forgive us, Our Father.” You see the proof right in front of your eyes - one *brachah* has no *shaychus* to the next one. They are two distinct worlds, unrelated.

DEVELOP A RELATIONSHIP WITH HASHEM

Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, ושובה אלי, “turn back to me,” ואשובה אליכם, “I’ll come back to you.” *Teshuvah* has nothing to do with *tikun chataim*. It has to do with one thing: developing your relationship with Hashem.

You could have a person who even maybe has *kaparas avonos* – but he never did *teshuvah*. Maybe he did all the *tikunim* that he’s supposed to do. He changes his behavior, but he says, “I don’t want to have a relationship with Hashem.”

I had a *talmid* that I made *frum*. Whenever I mentioned in a *shiur* the concept of having a relationship with Hashem, he got upset. He used to tell me, “Don’t make up a new *yiddishkeit*.” I’m not sure why, but he was extremely sensitive to the obligation of having to be *karov* to Hashem. He was ready to be a soldier in the army, and follow all the orders, but the *hiskarvus* to Hashem, he couldn’t relate to.

You have to know, *hiskarvus* is not merely the first step of *teshuvah*. “Okay,” you say, “that’s the first step, what’s the next step?” Is it *kaparah*? No. *Hiskarvus* is the *ikar teshuvah*. You’re wrong to think it is merely connected to *teshuvah*. The *chelek* of *kaparas avonos* is a new thing. Hashem tells us if you do *teshuvah* - a certain kind of serious *teshuvah* with all the *tenaim* - if you do a whole process, you’ll be *zocheh* to wipe out the past.

But you’ve got to understand what *teshuvah* is. That’s why you can do *teshuvah* a hundred times a day. Every time you make a mistake, every time you do an *aveirah*, every time you talk *lashon hara*, you say, “Hashem, I’m sorry I distanced myself from You. I want to come back.” Of course, you’ve got to mean it. If you don’t want to have a *shaychus* to Hashem – if the *rasha gamur* who married the lady didn’t mean that he wants to come back to Hashem, of course, it’s worth nothing. But the *gemara* (*ibid*) says שמה בלבו, והרהור תשובה בלבו, and if he did that, then the guy is a *tzaddik gamur*.

You know how many times I spoke to people who told me, “I feel like a *rasha gamur*”? I say, “It’s fine. So become a *tzaddik*.” So you know what they always say to me? “Easier said than done.” I tell them, “You’re making a mistake. It’s easier done than said. You’re wrong. Do *teshuvah*.”

I tell them, “Through your *cheit* you went away from Hashem. Say, ‘Tatty, I want to come back.’ That’s what you say.” Teshuvah is all about acknowledging that you went away from Hashem and now you want to come back.

You know who doesn’t do *teshuvah*? I’ve met *reshaim gemurim*, who say, “Don’t tell me about being close to Hashem. I’m very spiritual. I have a very close connection to Hashem”. I say, “You know what you have with Hashem? Spitting on Hashem. Nothing. *Gornisht*.” You can’t say I’m close to Hashem and continue to sin.

There was once a *rebbetzin* who went off the *derech*. She had 10 or 12 kids. She became *geferlich*. She became extreme. She used to walk around the neighborhood where she had been a *rebbetzin*, in front of everybody, acting *geferlich*. She once told my wife, “I have no qualms. I am very close to Hashem. I have a very good connection with Hashem.” She must have mistaken Hashem for one of these *reshaim* on the street.

A person has to know this: Before you open up the *sefer* of Shaarei Teshuvah, you have to first say to yourself, “Do *teshuvah*. I want to be *miskarev* to Hashem.”

SEEKING HASHEM: A DECISION TO BECOME CLOSE

If somebody utilizes these special days, Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, when Hashem says דרשו ה' בהמצאו, they could advance so much! You know what Hashem is telling us? These days it’s easier to decide to come close to Hashem. That’s all it means. These days, the days of *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, seek out Hashem. It’s even easier now.

And remember, the coming back to Hashem has nothing to do with any *ma’aseh*. It has nothing to do with the world of action. All it is is a decision to get close. In one second. שמה הרהור תשובה בלב.

Many times, when I would be *mekarev* somebody, I would talk to other people in *kiruv* and I would say, “Were you *zocheh* yet to get the person to do *teshuvah*?” “Nah, it takes years to get them to do *teshuvah*.” I would say, “No. My first thing is to introduce them to Hashem. I tell them all about Hashem. And I say, ‘Hashem loves you and Hashem is waiting for you. Just say the following, Hashem, I want to be close to you.’” It takes time until you become close to Hashem, but *teshuvah* can be done in an instant.

We once had a neighbor, back in the day. Once, in the middle of the night, they came knocking on our door. The guy was dying. They wanted a rabbi to come over. We lived in the same house as my grandfather (Rav Avidgor Miller). My grandfather was a *kohen*, so he couldn’t go over there. When they came over again, my father went over there instead. My grandfather told him, “Get him to do a *hirhur teshuvah*.” That’s all he wanted. Ask him, “If you could do it over again, would you want to be closer to Hashem?” If the guy says, “Yes,” you just turned this guy from a *rasha gamur* to a *tzaddik*.

There is a famous story with a *dybbuk* of a *yeshivah bachur*. When he was alive, the *bachur* went off the *derech*, and he went to Africa, and then he died. At some point later, his spiritual identity came into a living person. So when the rabbanim who were dealing with the *dybbuk* were questioning the *bachur*, they asked him, “We don’t understand you. Why didn’t you do *teshuvah*? Just one *hirhur teshuvah*! As you were dying, just one *hirhur teshuvah* and you are already a *tzaddik*! Whether you have *kaparas avonos* or not, that’s a different story. But you’re a *tzaddik*.” You know what he said? He was thrown off a wagon, and when the wagon tipped, he got discombobulated. He didn’t have his wits about him to do *teshuvah*. That’s all you’ve got to do - do *teshuvah*.

The problem is, a lot of people are such *reshaim* and they are all planning on doing *teshuvah* at the end of their life. I’ve spoken to a lot of *reshaim*. You know what they said? “Me, if I could do it over again, I wouldn’t do anything different.” And I said, “Wow, what a *tipesh*.” It’s one thing to be a *rasha* and another to be unintelligent. I’ve given you a way out, and you still say you wouldn’t change, you wouldn’t do anything different?! All I am asking is that you should have a close relationship with Hashem. That’s all. If you want a relationship with Hashem, you’re a *ba’al teshuvah* and a *tzaddik gamur*!

“BE A TZADDIK, DON’T STAY A RASHA”

It says on Rosh Hashanah, Hashem has the *sefer chayim* for *tzaddikim* open. We should be *zocheh* to be written inside, *besifron shel tzaddikim*. Some say *gemurim*, *l’alter*, whatever it is. But most importantly, we should be *tzaddikim*. If the guy is not a *tzaddik* on *erev Rosh Hashanah*, how is he going to become a *tzaddik* on Rosh Hashanah? The answer is very simple. Say, “Hashem, I want to come back to You. You are my *Melech*. I want to have a *shaychus* to You. I want to come closer. You understand that?”

Now you’ll understand something else. There is a *gemara* in Niddah (30b). The *gemara* says: In Tehillim it says מִי יֵעָלֶה בְּהַר ה', a person who has clean hands למרמה ולא נשבע נפשי ולא נשא לשוא נפשי ובר לבב אשר לא נשא לשוא נפשי, and he didn’t swear falsely. Now, what does that mean, he didn’t swear falsely? What do you think it means? You think, a lot of people like to swear. I swear to this, I swear to that.

Says the *gemara*, ומה היא השבועה, what is the *shavua*? We are talking about a specific *shavua* here. When you were born, Hashem said: “Step up to the plate. We’re sending you down. You’re next. Get ready to be a parachuter. You’re going down into *olam hazeh*.” Now, you were fighting, you were kicking and screaming because you didn’t want to go. They said, “You’re next.” It says, people are fighting and screaming, they don’t want to go down. Hashem sends us down *bal korchacha*, against our will. *Bal korchacha* you’re sent down into this world. Before you go, they tell you to keep quiet for a second and they say to you, “Say ‘I swear.’” You say, “I’m not saying nothing.” Okay, okay. There is another rule called *mashbiin osoi*, the *beis din* could *mashbia* you, they could adjure you. They are *mashbia* a person: תהי צדיק ואל תהי רשע. They put each person up in front of *malachim* and they say, תהי צדיק ואל תהי רשע.

I am sorry to tell you, is it possible that you're not going to do *aveiros*? Of course you're going to do *aveiros*. So what do they expect? You're never going to sin the rest of your life?! אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב ולא יחטא. Everybody makes mistakes. Everybody does wrong. So what is *pshat* over here?

You know what the answer is? To 'be a *tzaddik*' means to do *teshuvah*. "I'm giving you a gift of *teshuvah*," Hashem says. "I'm giving you a way out that any time you become a *rasha*, you can become a *tzaddik* again." אל תהי רשע means, if you do an *aveirah* and you become a *rasha*, don't stay a *rasha*. Become a *tzaddik* right away. To do that all you have to do is say, "Hashem, I'm sorry I distanced myself. I want to come back."

That's the first step to *teshuvah*. If you do that, then you are going to be in good shape. To be a *tzaddik* in the eyes of Hashem is a very valuable position.

It says ה' אוהב צדיקים. It doesn't say ה' אוהב רשעים - even though *reshaim* like to make up that *passuk* as if it's true for them. We used to have a joke when we were kids. We'd say, "Hashem watches a *tzaddik*, but He is שובר כל עצמותיו, he breaks all his bones." So we used to always ask, "Hashem breaks all his bones?! I thought Hashem loves *tzaddikim*?" So the guy's wondering - it's a *stirah* in the *passuk*! They open the *passuk*, you know what it says? It says, שומר כל עצמותיו. So I think a lot of these *reshaim* think it says ה' אוהב רשעים and ה' אוהב צדיקים ישמיד. They make a mistake. It doesn't say that. It says in the *pesukim*, ואת כל הרשעים ישמיד.

So what should you do? תהי צדיק. You took an oath. תהי צדיק, Hashem says. As much as you can, be a *tzaddik*. If a person does that, he is going to be *matzliach*.

IN CONCLUSION

What is our *avodah* in the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*? Doing *Teshuvah*! That means we have to focus all our energies on doing the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* and get past the *yetzer hara* that tries hard to distract us and may make us think that we can't succeed in doing *teshuvah*. We often confuse doing *tikun hamaasim* or *mechilas avonos* with doing *teshuvah*. These are important obligations but they are not the same thing as doing *teshuvah* which is returning to Hashem. And when a person has a *hirhur teshuvah*, that alone is enough to make him into a *tzaddik* - as long as he intends to continue drawing closer to Hashem. The *gemara* and the *Chofetz Chaim* tell us how easy it is to do the easy, initial, basic step of changing our status from '*rasha*' to '*tzaddik*.' The *aveirah* makes a person become distant from Hashem. *Teshuvah* is the simple *ratzon* to come back and be close to Hashem, and that closeness is the *ikar hateshuvah* - the main part of all our efforts. The *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* are here for us - it is a time when it is easy to seek out and build a relationship with Hashem. This week (*bli neder*) I will practice doing the first step in *teshuvah* by acquiring the status of 'a *tzaddik*.' I will say or think a few times: "Hashem, I'm sorry I distanced myself. I want to come close to You," and follow that up by deciding on ways to do that. In that way, I hope to continue the *teshuvah* process and be written and sealed in the book of *tzadikkim* for life.