

Fill Your Own Cup – Elul Series – Returning to Returning
Session One – Is Teshuva Returning or Renewal?

Derek Walcott, Love After Love, The Poetry Of Derek Walcott, 1948–2013

*The time will come
when, with elation,
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door, in your own mirror,
and each will smile at the other's welcome,
and say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was your self.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you
all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,
the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.*

1) Maimonides, Mishna Torah, Laws of Repentance

2:2

What IS Teshuvah?

That a person who has sinned should:

- 1) **abandon her sins** and remove them from her thoughts, resolving in her heart, never to commit them again as [Isaiah 55:7] states "May the wicked abandon his ways...."
- 2) Similarly, **she must regret the past** as [Jeremiah 31:18] states: "After I returned, I regretted." She must reach the level where the One who knows the hidden will testify concerning her **that she will never return to this sin again** as [Hoshea 14:4] states: "We will no longer say to the work of our hands: 'You are our gods.'"
- 3) **She must verbally confess** and state these matters which
- 4) **she resolved in her heart.**

2:4

Among the paths of repentance is for the penitent to...

change her name, as if to say "I am a different person and not the same one who sinned;"

רמב"ם משנה תורה הלכות תשובה

ב:ב

וימה היא התשובה.
הוא שיעזב החוטא חטאיו ויסירו
ממחשבתו ויגמר בלבו שלא לעשהו
עוד שנתאמר (ישעיה נה ז) "יעזב רשע
דרכו" וגו'. וכן יתנחם על שעבר
שנאמר (ירמיה לא יט) "כי אחרי שובי
נחמתי". ויזעיד עליו יודע תעלומות
שלא ישוב לזה החטא לעולם שנתאמר
(הושע יד ד) "ולא נאמר עוד אלהינו
למעשה ידינו" וגו'. וצריך להתנדות
בשפתיו ולומר ענינות אלו שגמר
בלבו:

ב:ד

מדרכי התשובה להיות השב ...
ומשנה שמו כלומר אני אחר ואיני
אותו האיש שעשה אותן המעשים.

2) Dr. Erica Brown, Return; Daily Inspiration for the Days of Awe, Introduction; Teshuva as Recovery 46-47

(USA 20th C)

<https://www.sefaria.org/Return; Daily Inspiration for the Days of Awe?tab=contents>

We commonly translate the word “teshuva” as repentance, from the Latin *penitire*, to feel sorrow, or *paenitere*, to be sorry or to regret. The latter is actually closer to our word *niham*, to regret or to experience remorse. We find this exact meaning early in Genesis, when God rethinks the nature of creation before the flood: “And God regretted that He had made man on earth, and His heart was saddened” (6:6). In this one verse, there is raw emotion; the sorrow generates regret. In Greek, this same idea is captured in the word *metanoia*, a combination of *meta* – after, and *noeo* – to think or to perceive. Repentance here is a reflection on the consequences of a bad decision, action, or judgment. We sin. We regret. Herein lies the feeling that underlies repentance, but it is not repentance itself. **It is a change of heart or mind that immediately precedes a change of behavior.** It is the raising of consciousness of sin and its after-effects. According to Jewish law, genuine teshuva cannot exist without this sentiment, but the feeling alone is not enough. Regret may change the future. It may not. **Shuv, on the other hand, is the action that follows the regret;** it is the slow process of reverse. Regret teaches us how to return. It is the best trigger to change. *Niham* is regret; *shuv* is return. Why not capture repentance with a Hebrew word for change or transformation? What are we returning to when we return? I believe the language signifies the most profound possible meaning of repentance in Jewish life. **It is not about change alone; it is about returning to the best self that one can be, acknowledging that every person has already achieved transcendence at some point, that we all know who we are when we are our best selves.** We know what that looks and feels like. Now we have to recapture it.

3) Esh Kodesh, Rosh Hashanna 5702

Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, *Piaseczno Rebbe*
(Warsaw, 1941)

Therefore, the time of repentance is Rosh HaShanah, the time of the world’s creation, **because repentance too—whose essence is the service of God henceforth—is a creation:** “Renew your deeds in the aspect of renewal, recreating the act of creation.”...

And first and foremost, we renew ourselves through repentance—not only that we cease to do what we have done until now and only do good, **but rather that we ourselves become new creatures, good, servants and ministers of God.** And then all the worlds will be repaired as mentioned...

אש קודש ראש השנה התש"ב

לכן זמן התשובה הוא בר"ה זמן בריאת העולם, מפני שגם התשובה שעיקרה היא עבודת ד' מעתה, בריאה היא, חדשו מעשיכם בחי' המחדש בכי"ת מעשה בראשית וראשית כל שנתחדש אנחנו בתשובה, לא בלבד שלא נעשה את אשר עשינו עד כה, ורק טוב נעשה, רק גם שנעשה בכל עצמנו בריות חדשות טובות, עובדי ועבדי ד', ואז גם כל העולמות יתקנו כנ"ל.

4) Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, *Orot haTeshuvah* 5:6

(Israel 19th-20th C)

A person’s life is perfected by developing his inherent character. And since one’s still-undeveloped character lacks insight, sin is guaranteed along this path of development. “There is no righteous person in the land who will commit good and not sin.” [Kohelet 7:20] On the other hand, eliminating one’s natural character in order to prevent sin is itself the greatest sin, [regarding which the Torah says of the *nazir* in Bamidbar 6:11,] “He shall atone for his sin against life.”

Therefore, Teshuvah repairs the damage [caused by sin and trying to be someone you are not] and restores the world and this person’s life to its root, precisely by helping the inherent character to develop.

הרב קוק, אורות התשובה ה:ו

שלמותם של החיים היא דוקא עם המשך התגלותם על פי טבעם העצמי. וכיון שהטבע הוא מצד עצמו אינו בעל הסתכלות והבחנה, הרי החטא מכרח הוא מצד זה. ואין אדם צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב ולא יחטא. ובטול עצם טבעיותם של החיים, כדי שיהיה האדם בלתי-חוטא, זהו עצמו החטא היותר גדול, "וכפר עליו מאשר חטא על הנפש". על כן התשובה מתקנת את הקלקול ומחזירה את העולם ואת החיים למקורו דוקא בגילוי יסוד עצמיותם העליון, עולם החרות, ועל שם כך מכנים שם ד' אלהים חיים.