



## On the Festivals

by

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### Sukkot

#### *Teshuvah in the Time of Rejoicing, Part 2*

In the previous discourse, we discussed the four forms of “complete *teshuvah*,” which take a person beyond the traditional aspects of *teshuvah*: abandoning and regretting one’s sinful actions, confessing the sins to Hashem and commitment to change in the future. “Complete *teshuvah*” goes further and entails the perfection of our *midot*; finding and developing the unique spark of our soul, the reason for which we came into this world; sanctifying ourselves in areas that are permitted by the Torah, and rectifying the damage our sins cause in the supernal worlds. We also discussed how these four types of *teshuvah* can be found in the days of Sukkot. We already discussed the relationship between Sukkah and the first three above. Presently, we will discuss Sukkah in relationship to the fourth type of “complete *teshuvah*” – the rectification of sins.

#### *Two Types of Teshuvah*

Hazal, as well as many later *seforim*, discuss two essential types of repentance: *teshuvah m’yirah* and *teshuvah m’ahavah* – repentance out of fear and repentance out of love. Both have the power to change the nature of our misdeeds. If a person does *teshuvah* out of fear, say Hazal, Hashem considers his intentional sins to have been unintentional. However, if a person does *teshuvah* out of love, Hashem regards his sins as though they were actually mitzvot.



We can also explain the difference between these two types of *teshuvah* is described as the that between the service of a slave and that of a son. A slave always serves his master for ulterior motives; whether out of fear of punishment or a desire to receive reward. Thus, his service is always limited. A slave would run away, if he could. Or, in the case of an indentured servant, he would never do more than he was initially contracted to do. A son however, serves his father out of love, and there is no limit to the efforts he will make to please his father.

Herein lies the difference between the *teshuvah* of Elul and the Ten Days of Repentance versus the “complete *teshuvah*” that starts immediately after Yom Kippur and continues through Sukkot.

### *Foreknowledge and Free Will*

To understand the above transition, we have to first understand one of the deepest concepts in Jewish philosophy: the paradox of Hashem’s omniscience and human free will. To put the matter simply: If Hashem knows all that we have done, all that we do, and all that we *will* do, then where is there room for our free will to express itself? If Hashem *knows* that I will do good, then I *must* do good, and vice versa – if he knows that a person will sin, then that person *must* sin. The obvious question arises: Where is human responsibility in this picture, on which the Torah’s entire system of reward and punishment is based?

The Rambam raises this question in *Mishneh Torah (Hilchot Teshuvah 5:5)*, though he does not provide a conclusive answer. (See the *Ravad’s* critique of him.) Rather, he explains that it is a matter of perspective. Human beings simply cannot comprehend Hashem’s mind, which is of a completely different nature than our own, as the verse says: “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways, says Hashem” (*Yeshayahu 55:8*). To our limited minds, this paradox is irresolvable, whereas Hashem’s thoughts are able to encompass this contradiction. He *knows* all that we will ever do, but His knowledge does not interfere with our own, independent ability to act as we choose.



## *Levels of Reality*

The Arizal offers a different solution to this problem. He explains that there are different “levels” to the revelation of Hashem in the world. The highest level is related to Hashem’s Name Y-H-V-H, while the lowest level is related to the Name Elo-him (which has the same numerical value as the Hebrew word for “nature”). The former corresponds to an aspect of revelation that is absolutely free of any negativity or judgment, while the second reflects Hashem’s running the world as we know it, according to the laws of reward and punishment. The first is the world as it is *run by Hashem*, based upon His beneficent will and omniscience; a world in which He knows and desires all that will be, and which He leads slowly to its final destination. The second is a world run according to our free choice and decisions, in which the future is seemingly not pre-determined. The first type of direction is concealed and incomprehensible; it is revealed to us only on rare occasions. The second defines how the world works in a revealed way, on an ongoing basis.

The Ramchal (R. Moshe Hayim Luzzatto) presents this idea in a slightly different way (*Derech Hashem, Da’at Tevunot*, etc.), though also based upon the Arizal. The Ramchal explains that there are two modes by which Hashem runs the world: the first called the way of *yichud* (the “particular”) or *mazal* (supernal influence), and the second, that of *misphat* (jurisprudence), which includes reward and punishment. The latter is more straightforward and easier to understand: If a person does a mitzvah, he receives reward; if he sins, he is punished, as the verse says: “If you go in My ways and keep My mitzvot, I will give your rain in its proper time...” (*Vayikra* 26:3).

The “particular” mode, however, is concealed, for it includes Hashem’s plan for creation that was formulated at the very beginning of time. It includes the perfection of all souls, and the rectification of the entire world. Slowly, hiddenly, Hashem turns the wheel of history to bring creation to its final goal. We, with our limited vision, see things solely in terms of good and bad, right and wrong, mitzvah versus sin. If we could see the big picture, however, we would view things differently. We would see how the entire puzzle of life fits together, and would not be deceived by the limited details.



For instance, the Talmud tells the story of R. Elazar bar Durdai, who was a great sinner, yet who did *teshuvah* and was admitted to *Gan Eden* in an instant (*Avodah Zara* 17a). We can say that, in a concealed way, all the sins he committed his entire life were simply a preparation for that one amazing moment of absolute *teshuvah* he did at the end. Had he not gone all the way down, he would never have felt that level of bitterness needed to propel him so high up. From Hashem's perspective, his sins were all foreseen, and meant to bring him ultimately to the pinnacle of closeness to Him.

### *A Double-Edged Sword*

These ideas are obviously very deep, as the Ramchal himself points out, and also very dangerous. If everything is foreseen, good and bad, sin and mitzvah, then even a person's wrongdoings were predestined and happened according to Hashem's will (as the Rashash writes about the sin of Adam, in *Rehovot HaNahar, Hakdamah*, p. 7b). Yet, a person is not allowed to sin and declare that his wrongdoing is part of Hashem's bigger plan. For the *Bet Din* in this world operates solely according to the laws of jurisprudence, as the verse says: "The hidden things are Hashem, our G-d's, but the revealed things apply to us and to our children forever, in order that we fulfill all the words of this Torah" (*Devorim* 29:28). If a person desecrates Shabbat, with full knowledge and having been warned, the Sanhedrin could put him to death. The fact that his actions may be contributing to Hashem's grand plan do not exempt him from earthly punishment. Only Hashem can make these calculations – what each person needs in order to reach perfection – for only He sees the whole picture, from the beginning to end of time.

Thus, at times, we may see a perfectly righteous individual suffering terribly, with the full force of judgment seemingly hurled against him. What did he do to deserve this? Well, perhaps nothing in this life. But if we could see all of his lifetimes together, his past and his future, as Hashem does, there would be no more questions. "Where were you when I established the earth?" Hashem challenges Iyov, after the latter's complaints (*Iyov* 38:4). Meaning to say, do you know where your soul came from? Do you know what it underwent through all the generations since Adam HaRishon? If not, how can you complain about the suffering you are undergoing? Be assured that it is for your own good.



This is the meaning of the verse: “We envisioned, Elo-him, Your kindness from within Your Sanctuary” (*Tehilim* 48:10). At times, Hashem seems to be dealing with us with the attribute of Elo-him; that is, harsh judgment. We examine our deeds, but can find no justification for this harsh punishment. We should remember, however, that the problem lies in our own limited perspective. “We envisioned Elo-him.” We envision Hashem as being harsh and judgmental. However, if we could rise up to a place of higher perspective, to see things from Hashem’s viewpoint, as it were, we would understand that it is really “Your kindness [as viewed] from within Your Sanctuary.” Everything we go through, even the worse circumstances, is really an expression of Hashem’s loving-kindness, and part of the process of bringing both ourselves and the world to completion and perfection.

These ideas are alluded to by Hazal, in the mishnah in *Pirkei Avot* (3:15): “Rabbi Akiva said: All is foreseen, but freedom of choice is given. The world is judged in goodness, yet all is proportioned according to one’s work.” “All is foreseen” from Hashem’s perspective, yet from our perspective “freedom of choice is given” and reward and punishment still exist: “the world is judged in goodness.” Hashem will ultimately reward the righteous in this world and in the world-to-come.

### *Hashem is Elo-him*

All this explains the transition from *teshuvah* out of fear to *teshuvah* out of love, which takes place at the end of the *Neilah* prayer of Yom Kippur, and defines our service of Hashem from then until the end of Sukkot. According to the Arizal (*Shaar HaKavanot, Derushi Yom HaKippur derosh* 4, p. 102b-c), the five prayers of Yom Kippur correspond to the five supernal worlds. As we pray, we ascend through all the worlds level by level, until *Neilah*, the final prayer of the day, which corresponds to *Keter* (“Crown”), the highest of all worlds. This level corresponds to Hashem’s name Y-H-V-H, which we mentioned above. It is the level of pure compassion, free of all harsh judgments. Furthermore, it is the level of *yichud* and *mazal*, in which Hashem alone directs all of creation. At that final moment of prayer, we declare “Hashem is Elo-him!” That is, the lowest level of concealment, judgment and free will is ultimately included in and subservient to the higher level, which is Hashem’s loving and encompassing embrace of all creation.



Before we reach this level, we are still in the domain of Elo-him, of free will and reward and punishment. Then we certainly have to fear Hashem's judgment. However, at the moment we ascend to the higher level in which Hashem alone reigns, and all that happens – even our own sins – can be seen to be part of the bigger picture, our feelings change as well. The moment we understand that everything that happens to us is an expression of Hashem's love, meant for our eternal good, then our own feelings of love express themselves as well. We move from *teshuvah m'yirah* to *teshuvah m'ahavah*. Our service of Hashem takes on a different form; becoming that of a son, rather than that of a slave. It is no longer necessary to bemoan our sins, but to rejoice in the great kindness that Hashem shows us in *every* aspect of our lives.

Thus, the period of Sukkot is indeed a time of *teshuvah*, but *teshuvah* out of love, when our sins are considered like mitzvot and even our mistakes and misdeeds are part of Hashem's plan to bring us closer to Him. This is the source of the great joy of Sukkot.

This is also the final category of "complete repentance," which we mentioned last week. How are the upper worlds fixed during the festival of Sukkot? Not through suffering and self-affliction, as may be necessary the rest of the year, but through love and joy. On the verse: "And you shall take for yourself on the first day..." (*Vayikra* 23:40), Hazal say: "Sukkot is the first – the first in the counting of our sins." Traditionally, this is understood to mean that Sukkot, coming after the clean slate of Yom Kippur, is the time when our sins begin to be accrued once again. However, according to our discussion above, we can explain Hazal's statement differently. After the profound revelation of Yom Kippur, Sukkot is a time of *teshuvah m'ahavah*. Thus, it is a time when we count all of our sins in order to transform them into merits (see *Kedushat Levi* and many other *seforim* on this).

May Hashem help us return to Him in *teshuvah shlemah*, and serve Him with a pure heart and in love.

**This essay contains divre Torah. Please treat it with proper respect.**