



The Ways of Teshuva (Repentance) According to the Kabbalah of the Ari'zal

Selections From Sefer Even HaShoham, the Shulkhan Arukh of the Kitvei HaAri'zal, Vol. 7 – Hilkhot Teshuva

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Chapter One

Now it is written, “Give strength unto G-d, upon Israel His pride.” (Ps. 68:35). The meaning is as if to say that HaShem needs help, assistance, and strength from the actions of Israel below.

Now the Malkhut (the holy Shekhina) is called the “Fallen Tabernacle (Succah) of David,” for in our sins, it has fallen due to our bad actions. Thus when there is desire for it to ascend it needs to be by our merits and our good deeds. It is as if to say that our sins cause it to fall and our merits enable it to rise.

Know then that each year has its own individual Angelic Prince. One does not have the authority to violate the border of another. This is also why one must do Teshuva each and every year. For the teshuva of one year does not apply to any other year. (Sefer HaLikutim, Tazria 45d).

Therefore, now it is impossible for Her [the Shekhina] to rise if we do not have amongst us purely righteous individuals, whose souls are holy and pure who have the power to elevate up to the place of Imma (Binah). By their hands will the Malkhut ascend, even as it says in the Tikunei Zohar (21, 58b), for Israel is called the wings of the Shekhina to raise her up above (Sha'ar HaKavanot, Kiryat HaMitah 6, 24b).

For this reason, our exile becomes greater and longer, for there is no one among us to rise up to this level. For if there was among us one who was able to elevate his soul there he would also elevate the Malkhut (the holy Shekhina) and thus speed along the End and the redemption. However, now in our days, in our many sins we cannot perform the appropriate Yihud (spiritual union) above. For this reason, this End is distant. Almost all ill and suffering that comes upon men is for this reason.



However, with all this, there is still a small rectification by those who, with all their hearts, offer their souls for the sanctification of G-d's Name. For by this, although we have no good deeds and have been horribly sinful, nonetheless by offering our souls to be killed all of our sins are atoned for. We thus have the ability to ascend to the Supernal Mother (Binah), as our Sages have taught (Yoma 86a), "So great is teshuva (repentance) that it reaches the Throne of Glory, as it is written (Hoshea 14:2), "Return Israel to HaShem your G-d."

For the matter of Teshuva elevates a man and brings him up to the Throne of Glory, which is the Supernal Mother who is called Teshuva. By this can the Malkhut (Binah) ascend with us, for we are the wings of the Shekhina.

It appears to me Haim that I heard from my teacher (o.b.m.) that one should [fast] four times in a year three complete days and nights, before Rosh HaShana, before Yom Kippur, before the Tenth of Tevet and before the 17th of Tamuz. Even if one does this only once in his lifetime, it is enough. It does not have to be done every year. However, these [fasts] are enough only to nullify from oneself that which has been ordained to come upon him in this world because of his sins. However, this does not nullify the punishment in the World to Come. (Sha'ar HaKavanot R.H. 90c).

The essence of the punishment of sins is when one is punished in Gehinnom after one dies. This [punishment] is not nullified by the previously mention fasts. However, one needs [perform] other rectifications as will be explained (in Sha'ar Ruah haKodesh 13, Sha'ar HaYihudim 3, 33).

All the good deeds that a man does all the while that he is a wicked person or the Torah he studies certainly do not add holiness to him. On the contrary, such a one adds strength to the forces of evil (klipot). Of such a one does the verse speak (Ps. 50:16), "and to the wicked one G-d says, to what purpose do you recount My decrees and bear My covenant upon your lips." Such a one [only] brings holy things into the realms of evil (klipot). By this one adds sins upon his wickedness and his sin will be greater than he can bear.

When one returns in Teshuva, he releases all the holiness that he put into the forces of evil and returns them to holiness. This is [true] repentance, that one restores a thing to its rightful place. His reward [for doing so] is multiplied greatly because he subdues the forces of evil and releases the holiness from within them. He [thus] gives power to holiness when he brings it inside himself. With this will we understand what our Sages



have taught (Yoma 86b) that, “one’s sins are turned into one’s merits.” (Sha’ar HaYihudim 3, 11, 40b).

Chapter Two

May it be for a good sign that I begin to write the rectifications for the sick of soul, even as I have heard from the mouth of the holy Kabbalist, his honor, my teacher, Rabbi Yitzhak Ashkenazi (o.b.m.).

Being that a human being is created from both physical and spiritual matter, [the spiritual matter being] the nefesh, ruah and neshama souls [with the neshama being] a portion from G-d above as it is written (Gen. 2:7), “and He breathed into him the soul of life” (nishmat hayim). The body is dense physical matter from the side of the husks [klipot]. It acts as an accuser, hinders one from spiritual completion, and cuts one off from the Tree of Life. [The evil inclination is activated at one’s birth and by the time one becomes aware of good at the time of one’s bar/bat mitzvah, the evil inclination is already called] an old and foolish king. [This is because the evil inclination] was born thirteen years prior to the [descent of the] neshama into the body. Therefore, there is no righteous one on earth who does good and yet, who has not sinned.

It is known that sin blemish, stain and undermines the soul. This then is the sickness of the pure soul. When the soul is tainted and blemished it is not able to see or grasp true completion, which [comes through the study of] the secrets of the Torah. [The reason why this is so important is that it] enables [the soul] to bond [with G-d]. For this [reason] was [the soul] created.

Therefore [on Judgement Day, the soul will be asked] did you [when alive] ever meditate upon the Supernal Image, which is [to be found within] the secrets of the Torah? Sin causes there to be a division and separation between the soul and the Creator [disabling the soul] from seeing and understanding Supernal, holy and pure matters. (Olat Tamid, Tefilah, 46a).

Just as when one is physically sick, the doctor gives him/her bitter medications to swallow, yet these very things restores him/her to his natural state of health as he/she once was. Thus it is with the sick soul, in order to remove the illness the soul needs to accept upon itself the bitterness of the [spiritual] medication, which is Teshuva, with suffering, fasting, sackcloth and ashes, stripes, and going to the mikvah. [With these things] will one become pure from the filth and blemish of sin.



In order [for us] to be able to grasp and understand Supernal matters, which are the mysteries of the universe, which is the wisdom hidden from ancient days in the time of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai (o.b.m.) until now, we have our teacher, the holy, the godly Kavod Moreynu Yitzhak Di Luria (o.b.m.). For by the spirit of prophecy that was within him [did he] begin to enlighten our eyes in this sacred wisdom.

[The Ari'zal] would never reveal any of the secrets of this holy wisdom to one that he saw had a blemished soul. [First] he would give him a rectification to perform in order to rectify his sins. (Olat Tamid, Tefilah, 46b). {Let this as a lesson to all those who study Kabbalah without the observance of the mitzvot}.

Our Sages have said (Yoma 38b) that, “one who comes to purify him/her self is assisted [from above].” In order to achieve personal merit and to benefit those who wish to perform sincere repentance, who wishes to purify his soul and enter into the “vineyard of wisdom” I [Rabbi Haim Vital] will write [a list] of the sins that people stumble over, be it in their youth or old age, and the healing that is needed for each and every sin.

One must know the place of the blemish [in one's soul] so as to know what to rectify, and what specific Teshuva one needs perform in order to rectify one's sins. What we find from the mouth of the Rav (the Ari'zal), are the meditations, and the rectifications that are necessary for each and every sin so that one's heart will tremble because of one's sins and return to HaShem who will have mercy. (Olat Tamid, Tefilah, 46b).

The rectification for a man who misses any of the following four positive commandments, a) not praying, b) not wearing Talit or c) not wearing Tefillin or d) not reciting the Shema is to fast 61 days for each of them. (Sha'ar Ruah HaKodesh, Tikun Alef, 13a).

Note: Most individuals today do not have the physical stamina to fulfill the required number of fasts. These and the following fast requirements are fulfilled today by giving similar dollar amounts to tzedaka. For further information on this, see Sefer HaTanya, Igeret HaTeshuva.

One who sins in thought must fast 87 days. (Sha'ar Ruah haKodesh, Tikun Bet, 13b).

One who violates an oath or who swears falsely, his rectification is to fast 28 days in a row.

One who speaks about disgusting things should fast for 37 days. (Sha'ar R.H. Tikun 6, 14b).



To rectify the sin of arrogance and mockery (both are the same) is to fast 55 days. (S.R.H. Tikun 6, 16b-17b).

One who sins by dishonoring one's father or mother should fast 45 days. This is the number of Av (Father) and Em (mother). (Tikun Tet).

The rectification for one who publicly embarrasses another is to roll naked in a bed of thorns.

One who stays awake all night, who doesn't sleep at all but who studies Torah all the night long will be exempt from punishment for one sin liable of excommunication (karet), (if one did such G-d forbid). Each night exempts one [sin liable of] karet. (S.R.H. 11a).

One who has relations with a woman who has not immersed after her menstrual cycle should fast 59 days. Each day he must go to the mikvah, and not have any intimate relations other than on Shabat, Yom Tov and Rosh Hodesh. All other nights he should sleep on dust.

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The rectification for a Jewish man who sleeps with a Gentile woman. Our Sages have said (Tanhuma, Vayeshev 8) that "one who sleeps with a Gentile woman, she becomes attached to him like a dog." What our Sages meant here was that if a Jewish man were to have intimate relations with a Gentile woman, he will reincarnate in his next life as a dog.

His rectification is that he roll himself in snow seven or nine times.

The rectification for adultery is to fast 325 days.

Each of these days one is to wear sackcloth and one must put some ashes on his forehead in the place where the head tefillin is worn.

To rectify the sin of homosexuality one should fast 233 days.

The soul of the sinner and his supernal image is either muted, deafened or blinded [as a result of the sin]. Each sin causes its own blemish.

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Immediately once one does teshuva, his/her supernal form is restored completely as at first.

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Chapter Three

Everyone who sins, if he/she does Teshuva then the Supernal Imma (Binah), who is called teshuva has the ability to rectify the person's blemish and this will be enough.

However, if one does not do Teshuva, one will need to return in reincarnation to rectify his/her sin. This [comes about] through Abba (Hokhma), for He is called Thought as is known. Regarding Him is it written (2 Shmuel 14:14), "[Let him] ponder thoughts so that no one be banished from him." It is [the sefirat] Hokhma that returns the soul in reincarnation in order to rectify it.

We will now explain the matters of Teshuva, and we will also explain the saying of Rabbi Matya Ben Heresh (o.b.m.) in the last chapter of Yoma (86a), regarding the four parts of atonement; "if a man violate a positive commandment etc..." (Sha'ar HaGilgulim 21, 20a).

The first part [of atonement] is if one violates a positive commandment. This blemishes the realm of Asiyah. When one repents and does Teshuva, he will not move from his place until he is forgiven immediately. For by violating a positive commandment one causes the descent of the Malkhut of Asiyah. When one repents and does Teshuva, it easily ascends and immediately rectified. (20b).

The second part [of atonement] is if one violates a negative commandment and repents, his/her [forgiveness] is postponed, and Yom Kippur will atone. For this sin blemishes the realm of Yetzirah and causes a separation between the Malkhut and six Sefirot (HaGaT, NaHiY) who [become] concealed [because of the sin]. When one does Teshuva the Malkhut is restored to Her place. However, She still must wait for the Lights of Beriah, (which are called Yom HaKippurim). Then She will ascend up to there. This is what it means when it says that forgiveness is suspended and Yom Kippur will atone. (21a)



The third part [of atonement] is if one were to violate a commandment punishable by either being cut off or by being put to death by the Court. This blemishes Beriah. Thus when one does Teshuva, both forgiveness and Yom Kippur are suspended for the Tiferet (really, the whole HaGaT, NaHiY) and Malkhut both are unable to ascend above to their rightful places, until one endures suffering, which come from Abba and Imma (Hokhma and Binah). They will cleanse the sin in accordance to the secret meaning of the verse (Ps. 118:18), "G-d (specifically the Name YaH, spelled Yod Hey) has chastened me exceedingly." [The Name YaH, spelled Yod Hey] refers to Abba (Yod) and Imma (Hey), for from them emanate trials and tribulations.

The forth part [of atonement] is if one were to commit a Hillul HaShem (desecration of G-d's holy Name). This blemishes Atzilut, which is called the World of Life, wherein which there is no death. [Such a sinner] causes there to be death in the World of Eternal Life. Therefore, Teshuva, Yom Kippur, and suffering are suspended. For not one of the three worlds (Beriah, Yetzirah, Asiyah) are able to ascend above to their places until the death of the sinner. This is measure for measure. [One's death] will then atone for one completely.

Now I will explain the difference between [the two types of sins] Avon and Pesha. A Pesha sin is when one knows his Master and intentionally intends to rebel against Him, to anger Him. This causes the klipot (forces of evil) to take all the Supernal Radiance (source of blessing) and they do not give any of it to Israel below. An Avon sin is when one does what he wants following his desires. This enables the klipot to also take the Supernal Radiance that descends [from Heaven], however after they take it, they pass on the smallest amount of it to us below.

With this insight will one understand the two statements recorded in Yoma (86b). One says that so great is Teshuva that one's intentional sins become like unintentional sins. This is speaking about one that intentionally sins, the Pesha. Initially such a one causes the klipot (forces of evil) to take all of the Supernal Radiance for themselves. Now, by his deeds of Teshuva he causes the klipot to give us a portion of the Supernal Radiance after they have taken a portion for themselves.

The other statement is that [when one does Teshuva] one's intentional sins become like merits. This is speaking about the Avon [type of sin], where one sins only due to lust. When one does Teshuva, he causes the klipot not to take any portion of the descending Supernal Radiance at all. [Such a one] prevents [the forces of evil] from taking even their own portion.

Know that there is hardly any man on Earth who does not return in reincarnation.



Now the wicked, after they die, enter Gehinnom (Hell), where they are judged for twelve months.

There are those wicked of whom it is written (I Sam. 25:29), "And may He hurl away the soul of your enemies as one shoots a stone from a slingshot." [These souls] do not merit entering Gehinnom. Their souls go from bad to worse in various reincarnations until their sins are partially removed. [Only then] are they able to enter Gehinnom for twelve months to atone completely. For [these reincarnations] there is no set time. Sometimes one reincarnates for twenty years, sometimes for a hundred or [even] a thousand years.

The Righteous and Torah Scholars however are not subject to the fires of Gehinnom. Therefore, they need to reincarnate into this world to cleanse any sin that they might have. With a Tzadik, immediately upon his death he is punished to cleanse him of whatever serious sins he might have. Then he is taken one level higher. When it comes his turn to ascend to the next higher level, he is again punished to cleanse him of his sins that were less serious than the first ones. Then he ascends a second time to an even higher level. Then he is punished again over the finest points of the mitzvot, which are as a hair's breadth. Then he ascends to his rightful place of which he is worthy. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim 22, 21a).

A number of times I (Rabbi Haim Vital) would be walking with my teacher (the Ari'zal o.b.m.) in a field and he would say to me, that there was such and such an individual whose name was so and so and he a Tzadik and Talmid Hakham (a learned Rabbi). Yet, for the reason of such and such a sin that he did when alive, he is now reincarnated into this stone, or plant or similar thing. My teacher never ever knew the person of whom he spoke. We investigated the manner [to see if there really was such a person] and we found his words were indeed true.

After one dies his sins are ripped out of him prior to his entering Gehinnom by many different ways of punishments, all of which are called reincarnations. This means that one will reincarnate in an inanimate object, a plant, an animal, or a person. Almost all human beings are subject to these reincarnations.

Sometimes after the leaf is destroyed [the soul] returns and reincarnates in another leaf. This too will be destroyed. [This cycle repeats numerous times] similar to how one reincarnates as a person numerous times, all in accordance to the appropriate punishment. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim 22, 23a).



Know that all souls that are reincarnated and all souls otherwise punished by the heavenly Court have an angel that goes before them and proclaims their sins and what is their punishment. The proclamation follows the soul into every reincarnation and never leaves his side. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim 22, 23a)

There is also an angelic "policeman" who carries out on the soul the appropriate punishment. When the soul is pushed into a reincarnation this enforcement angel keeps the soul there until its punishment is complete.

The vast majority of those reincarnated or otherwise punished also have a Heavenly Court that is constantly watching them. The Court periodically changes the soul's punishment from time to time from one thing to another in accordance to the appropriate sentence and judgement.

There are those who will reincarnate into animals.

One who donates charity with a haughty heart will reincarnate as a bee.

A Jewish man who has intimate relations with a Gentile woman will reincarnate after his death as a dog. (Sha'ar Ruah HaKodesh, Tikun 20, 20a).

One who has sexual relations with an animal will be reincarnated as a [vampire] bat. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim 22, 23a).

A Jewish man who has intimate relations with a menstrual woman will be reincarnated as a Gentile woman. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim 22, 23b).

One who commits adultery will reincarnate as a donkey.

One who commits the sin of homosexuality will reincarnate as a male or female rabbit, depending on which aspect of the sin he committed.

One who continuously looks at immodest members of the opposite sex will be reincarnated as a vulture.

One who acts without mercy to the poor will reincarnate as a crow.

One who causes a Jew to forfeit money in a Gentile court (and not by Jewish Law) will reincarnate as a rapid dog.



Rabbis and Tzadikim that need to reincarnate to be cleansed of some minor sins will reincarnate as [dolphins or as other such] fish of the sea.

All these apply only when the individual sinner in question has not done Teshuva, for nothing stands in the way of Teshuva.

Chapter Five

The essence of all good midot (personality attributes) is that one should behave to the ultimate degree with humility, humbleness, and fear of sin.

One should to the ultimate degree stay away from pride, anger, strictness, mockery, and slander.

Even if one has good reason to be demanding, one should nonetheless not be overly strict. (Sha'ar Ruah HaKodesh 11a). One should not be demanding even with the members of one's own family.

One should keep distant from wasteful speech, although this is not as serious as the others listed above.

Know that from here to Heaven there are numerous [angelic] accusers and angels of destruction. In each of the seven Heavens, there are a number of gates. At each gate, there are a number of guardian angels. When a soul ascends there, they examine him/her to see if he/she is worthy. If yes, then the gates are opened and the soul ascends. If not, the soul is cast out and the gates are locked before them, blocking their entry. Therefore, every intelligent person should pay attention and place appropriate boundaries around one's [attitudes and behaviors]. Only then will the Gates of Righteousness be opened.

There are three types of sinful pride. There is the type where one is proud in one's heart, yet before others he/she appears humble. Regarding this is it written, "if the person will have on the skin of his flesh a swelling" (Lev. 13:2), meaning that one's pride is concealed under the skin of his flesh. Such pride is not apparent to all, but it is evident to the individual him/herself.

The second type of sinful pride is when one is haughty over one's peers, but not over one who is greater in either wisdom or number. This is like a skin rash, which clings to healthy skin.



The third type of sinful pride is truly an illness similar to leprosy. This is when one is haughty even over those greater than him/her in wisdom, number and wealth. Such a one turns up his/her nose at all. This is arrogant pride.

All three of these does G-d hate. All three types of pride cause one to become open to disease. Even the first type, which is the least serious where one's pride is not exposed, does the verse apply, "and it will become an illness of leprosy on the skin of his flesh. Such a one will be severely punished, even more so those who expose their haughtiness.

We have found that G-d hates haughtiness as it is written, "G-d rules, clothed in pride" (Ps. 93:1). For G-d's "pride" is a reference to His glory, which covers Him like a garment. For within the physical worlds G-d is cloaked in His Powerful Glory, which can be called His "pride." This is done for all to be in awe of Him. Yet, this revelation lasts for only a moment. From this do our Rabbis learn (Megilah 31a), that whenever we find mention of G-d's greatness we also find His humbleness.

Humbleness (Anava) is numerically equal to the name of the Satan. This is to suggest to us that the Satan will never dominate one who is sincerely humble. The Satan is not able to level accusations against the truly humble.

With regards to anger, my teacher (the Ari'zal) o.b.m. was extremely careful with regards to anger more than with any other sin.

His reason was that no other sin could cause an exchange of a person's soul more than anger. For when a person becomes angry his pure neshama soul departs from him and in its place enters another spirit from the side of evil.

For this reason, one who gets angry will lose his/her spirit of prophecy and wisdom (Pesachim 66b). This holds true even if one is a great and pious Sage. . . . even if one is angered over a matter of a mitzvah.

This is the secret of the verse (Job 18:4), "his soul is torn asunder in his anger." For one tears asunder his/her soul and makes it unclean and dead all the while when he/she is angry. His soul gets mangled and is cast away from him.

Even when a person does rectifications for his soul and performs many mitzvot, all become completely lost due to anger. For when his soul is lost and another comes to take its place, one must then start again from the beginning of the process of rectification. This occurs each and every time one gets angry.



We thus find that there is no repair for the one who gets angry, rather he is like a dog that returns to its vomit. If the person has a guardian angel (ibbur neshama) then this too is removed.

One who is always angry is not able to receive any true insights. For he destroys everything that he builds. Other sins do not cause this much damage to the soul. While other sins blemish the soul, they can be repaired by performing a specific meditation corresponding to the specific sin. That sin can thus be removed.

Anger however requires many rectifications and meditations to restore the soul and return it after it has been so ravaged. Anger does more than blemish the entire soul; it ravages and kills the soul. In the Zohar (Titzaveh 182b), it says that one who gets angry is like one who worships idols.

Every individual has two angels that escort him at all times, one to his right and one to his left. If one is a tzadik (righteous) then the angel on the right cries out before him, "give honor to the image of the Holy One, blessed be He." If one is a rasha (evil) then the angel on the left cries out, "This one rebels against his master." (Pri Etz Haim - Kriyat Shema Al HaMitah, 11, 79b).

It is an accepted teaching in our hands that when one rises from his bed when the rays of the sun are on the horizon (or slightly before) and does not sleep the entire day and night afterwards, eats only the minimal amount necessary and sits and studies Torah and mitzvot until the following morning when the rays of the sun begin to be seen on the horizon, these actions will save one from the punishment of one sin of karet (cutting off of one's soul).

It is a good thing that everyday one read Psalm 20, "May HaShem answer you on the day of trouble." (Sha'ar Ruah HaKodesh 12b).

A person needs to accustom him/herself to giving Tzedaka (charity) to the point where the hand acts automatically to give. (Sefer HaLikutim, Shemot, 29b).

It is good for one to visualize before him/herself at all times the Name YKVK with the vowels of the word Yirah (fear). This is the secret of the verse, "I place HaShem before me, always" (Ps. 16:9). This will cause one to cultivate a great fear of G-d in his/her heart. [In this way] will one's soul become purified. (Pri Etz Haim 83c, Mishneh Berurah 1:4).

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In order for one to achieve wisdom there are certain conditions [that need be fulfilled].

The first condition is that one must be silent. One must lessen what one speaks as much as is possible. One should never speak wasteful words. Thus have our Rabbis taught (Avot 3:13), "the safeguard of wisdom is silence."

The second condition is with regards to every subject of Torah study be it in Pshat (Gemara, Halakha) or Sod (Kabbalah, Zohar) whatever is not clearly understood one should sit and cry over it all that one is able. (Sha'ar Ruah haKodesh 6b).

The observance of Shabat with all its Halakhic details in deed and in speech greatly elevates one's level of spiritual insight. (Sha'ar Ruah HaKodesh 11a).

Going to the Synagogue and sitting there in awe of G-d, with fear and devotion assist greatly in receiving Ruah HaKodesh (Divine inspiration).

My teacher (the Ari'zal) o.b.m. told me that the essential way for one to receive Divine inspiration is to be meticulous in reciting the blessings over food. (Sha'ar Ruah HaKodesh 11a).

One also must be careful everyday to set times for study of Torah, Mishna, Talmud, and Kabbalah, each with their appropriate meditations. One must be very careful about this.