

**MAIMONIDES**  
**THE LAWS OF REPENTANCE**  
WITH COMMENTARY

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**IN EVERLASTING MEMORY**

***Chaim Shlomoh Klein  
the son of Simcha Klein***

***and his beloved wife  
Rivkah Ratzah Klein  
the daughter of Avraham***

***and their beloved grandson  
Altar Chaim Shlomoh Klein  
the son of Simcha Zaev Klein***

***may their memory be blessed***

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## *Introduction*

The rules for repentance and forgiveness have many variables. Some of these variables are, whether there is a Holy Temple to bring sacrifices, the severity of the sin, one's intention when doing the sin, if he knows that he sinned, and if he forgot the sin. When GOD accepted our sacrifices instead of human suffering, we were closer to being forgiven for sin.

The basic laws of repentance are not many nor are they complicated, however repentance is not a simple matter. Underlining it are one's character traits and one's knowledge of the Torah and its laws (halacha). Bad character traits are an impediment to obeying the Torah because they emanate from the animalistic body of the human, however, the Torah preaches abstinence from many animalistic ways, therefore, the Torah emanates from the human's spiritual soul. If one does not know the Torah, he does many sins out of ignorance. There are character traits specifically for penitence. Levels of penitence are defined as how close one comes to convincing his Creator that he truly regrets violating the mitzvah and he is totally sincere about never doing it again.

Reward is related to one performing a mitzvah or not doing a sin. Punishment is related to not performing a mitzvah or doing a sin. With the exceptions of court-related punishments, reward, punishment, and forgiveness for sin is in the realm of the Almighty. It is therefore one of the most difficult subjects in the study of the Torah.

This commentary deals with the primary topic of Maimonides' book on penitence, and it precisely defines repentance, character traits of repentance, and good and bad character traits. There is also an analysis of reward and punishment in our world and after death.

It is prophesied that in the end of days, those who repent will be redeemed and will merit to live in the period of the Messiah. May we all succeed in repenting now and not put it off for the end of days.

Rabbi David Shure  
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א' אלול תשס"ד

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE COMMANDMENT TO REPENT

**[1:1]** If a person violates any *mitzvos* of the Torah, willingly or unintentionally<sup>1</sup>, by neglecting to perform a

1. *This work deals with sin and repentance. It is the basis for our existence from the time that Adam and Eve were created. It is also the basis of our ideology and goal in life, for us to strive for perfection in this world in order to merit the World to Come. Adam and Eve would have entered into the World to Come had they not sinned.*

*I will now proceed to introduce the subject of sin and repentance.*

*It is said in the name of the great scholar, Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, may his memory be blessed, that the evil inclination deals with three types of personalities. One type is a person with a strong character who refuses to listen to him. Another type is a person who will initially not listen to him, but after much persuasion will follow him. A different type, is a person with a weak character who will go after temptation on his own. The evil inclination helps him increase his misdeeds in quality and quantity.*

*There are three categories of sinners. One type of person knowingly sins, and also knows that what he is doing is wrong. He may be doing it to enjoy life in this world, and as far as his judgment day after death, he will then take the matter up with his Creator. He may feel that his Creator did not treat him properly, and therefore, he will not listen to Him. Another type of person is basically a God fearing person but he is not careful in his ways and often sins accidentally or carelessly. A different type of person who is God-fearing and careful in his ways and generally does not sin, but he will not sacrifice his life for the Torah when required.*

*Let us attempt to understand the sin of Adam and Eve, which was the first sin. God commanded Adam not to eat the fruit of the tree of understanding. This tree was forbidden because it gave Adam the choice of good and evil. Adam was created with having the choice to do good or evil, therefore, he was warned that if he eats its fruit he will be punished and die. The reason the fruit was forbidden is that it gives man understanding about the evils that he may do on earth, which will put man in difficult and trying situations where he can easily sin. This was man's first lesson in conducting himself on earth. It is not for man to tempt evil and test himself, it is God who tests man.*

*The evil inclination first approached Eve and convinced her that no harm would come to her by eating the fruit of the tree of understanding because, when she would eat it she would be transformed into a deity and a deity cannot be punished. Her sin was heresy because she believed that she could become a deity. The bad character trait that led her to this deed was that she did not fear the awe of her Creator but she feared His punishment, and if He cannot punish her she can ignore His command. Adam however, sinned out of temptation, because he listened to his wife. The actual sin for which their punishment was meted out was for not obeying the command of their Creator, and not because of the evil that they brought upon themselves by eating the fruit.*

*If Adam and Eve had not eaten this fruit, they would have merited the World to Come within the Garden of Eden. God banished them from the Garden of Eden because he felt that they cannot be trusted and they will not accept their punishment to die, but they will try to outsmart God and eat from the Tree of Life in order to live forever. It is obvious to us that if God decrees death on a person he cannot escape this decree even if he eats from the Tree of Life. However, it is not proper to allow people who have become corrupted to live in the holy Garden of Eden, and they must be banished.*

*After man's sin, he was obligated to repent this sin and correct his bad characteristics in order to work his way back upwards to the Garden of Eden and the World to Come. Mankind was then given seven moral ethical rules and commanded to obey and enforce them.*

*By committing the first sin, they also profaned the name of God (chillul Hashem), since Eve sinned by heresy, and Adam violated a direct command from God without any excuses. Forgiveness for this sin when there is no Holy Temple and therefore no special Yom Kippur sacrifices, requires repentance, suffering, and death.*

*After some generations, the master plan for man to work his way back upwards did not work out. They violated their seven moral laws by stealing, immoral relations, idol worship, witchcraft, homicide, feticide, infanticide, and many more abominable practices.*

*Then arose the religious activist, the patriarch, Abraham, who, on his own, realized the falsehoods of idol worship, and the necessity of the seven moral laws, and debated with kings and monarchs. He braved the fires of Nimrod, and other persecutions to*

sanctify the name of God our Creator. He also attended the religious seminaries of the sons of Noah, Shem and Ever, and there he studied the 613 Mitzvos which were to become the basis of the Jewish religion and Jewish nation. The 613 Mitzvos at that time were not obligatory, but the great men of those generation practiced them out of love for their Creator.

God our creator was disappointed that Abraham did not succeed in changing the world, He decided to build a Jewish nation from the seed of their patriarch Abraham, and with the expectation that this Jewish nation might influence the nations to believe in God our Creator.

The Jewish nation started with the giving of the Ten Commandments and the 613 Mitzvos (oral law) on mount Sinai. For this, Moses the prophet studied on mount Sinai forty days and nights. This includes the thirteen principals of faith of the Jewish religion. These mitzvos purify the individual and bring the people closer to God and merits the person in the World to Come.

The evil inclination began its deception at the onset, just forty days after the Ten Commandments were given. It began telling them that Moses would remain in heaven and that they needed a new leader. They could have chosen Aaron as their new leader. It appears that there were idol worshipers amongst them who denied the unity of God their Creator, and these people believed in a second god or idol. Their second god was the golden calf who, they claimed, punished the Egyptians and took them out of Egypt. The God who gave them the Ten Commandments was the superior God who abides in heaven, but the god who deals with what is below heaven, who punished Egypt, is the golden calf. This still does not explain how they twisted the words of God, Who explicitly forbade idol worship in the Ten Commandments, unless they bound the Ten Commandments with Moses. That is to say, that Moses is so holy that he can communicate with the superior God, and therefore, it is forbidden to worship the lower gods only as long as Moses is our leader, if he went to heaven then we must worship the golden calf as usual. The idolatrous group was a very small group, yet, because the Hebrews minded their own business and did not stop them, it was considered complicity in this sin, and they were all guilty. God accepted their repentance after they destroyed the idolatrous group.

Not long after this sin, came the heretical theological rebellion of Korach who challenged both the prophecy of Moses and his authority as teacher of the oral law. They were the forerunners of later heretical movements, more notably the Tzedukim (Saducees) who did not accept the Talmudic interpretations of the Bible and Rabbinic law. Then came the Reform movement and the Conservative movement, who do not accept the halacha, and have rejected many of the thirteen principals of faith of the Jewish religion.

In recent generations we have witnessed an erosion of traditional Rabbinic rules used in rendering halachic decisions.

The first breach is, that anyone who has Rabbinical ordination may render his own decision for others, even if it conflicts with the decision of the Sages of the generation.

The second breach is, that anyone who has Rabbinical ordination has no obligation to adhere to the accepted opinions of the Sages about matters of religion concerning the orthodox community (Daas Torah).

The third breach is, that anyone who has Rabbinical ordination may overturn a halachic ruling that was accepted and practiced for generations by a community, and even if the contemporary majority opinion is against his ruling. (According to halacha, only a body of Sages who are greater in Torah wisdom and greater number than the previous body of Sages may overturn an accepted decision providing that this body of Sages represent the majority opinion of the time.)

The fourth breach is that they created a new law that permits them to allow people to violate a lesser law in order to prevent them from violating a more severe law. This breach was first used to permit mixed dancing between Jewish singles in the synagogue's party room with the excuse that they are giving Jewish singles an opportunity to meet and perhaps find a husband or wife, and thus they are preventing intermarriage. When they were asked how do they permit mixed dancing at weddings and Bar-Mitzvos, their reply was, that they permit only husband and wife dancing and not exchanging partners.

A recent version of this breach is with the construction of so-called Eruvim in the boroughs of Brooklyn and Manhattan of New York City, although it was an accepted ruling for generations that these boroughs are public domains. The vast majority the Rabbinical authorities have ruled that nothing has changed and that these boroughs remain public domains.

The founding of the Jewish nation was the second stage in the plan to help elevate mankind spiritually in order that they may merit the World to Come. This period met with much more success than the earlier period. Although the majority of the Jews have assimilated over the last two thousand five hundred years, nevertheless, Jews remain prominent in the world, and have done much to

positive commandment or by violating a negative commandment,<sup>2</sup> he must repent<sup>3</sup>. He is also commanded to repent through making a verbal confession before God, as it is written, "If a man or woman sins against his fellow man ... he must confess the sin he has committed." (Deuteronomy 5:6,7). This verse refers to a verbal<sup>4</sup>

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*influence many nations to abandon idol worship and feticide. Torah studies have increased significantly throughout the Jewish communities, and we are now prepared to enter the third period, known as the Messianic period.*

*The Messianic period has received much attention by the prophets, and its concept has caused cultural upheavals either by personalities claiming to be Messiah, or by their followers who declared their leader to be the Messiah. These movements have not brought peace to the world. The prophets did not prophesy about the Messianic period to tell us something new. Their primary purpose was to give the Jews the hope of salvation that they would need during their long and bitter exile.*

*The term Messiah means anointed, or the anointed one. Why do we refer to Messiah as the anointed one when every king must be anointed? The answer is, that it is to emphasize his anointing as different from the anointing of other kings. His anointing is an appointment to rule as king by God and not by man. Man has no say in the matter and no possibility of disobedience. God will give him angels to help police the world. The purpose of his rule is to institute the kingdom of God our Creator, which means to see that mankind follows the laws of God. These laws are, for the non-Jewish population, the seven moral ethical rules of mankind with their auxiliary rules, and for the Jews, the Biblical and Rabbinical laws of the halacha.*

*During the Messianic period, man will undergo purification of the body and soul and bring him closer to God in order to merit the World to Come.*

*Unintentional sins are punishable because if he had been more careful, he would not have sinned.*

2. *God our Creator did not entrust the power to forgive sin to any creation. He alone fully understands the hearts and minds of his creation therefore, He alone judges them.*

*The Talmud Yerushalmi tractate Makos, relates an incident in Jewish history when the prophets asked wisdom (wisdom of the Torah), what is the punishment for one who sinned? Torah wisdom answered, "Evil will pursue him." They asked the angels the same question, and they answered, "a sinner should die." Then they asked their Creator this question, and the reply they received was, "a sinner should repent." This reply is a contradiction to the other opinions since certain types of sin are not punished if one repents; and most sins were forgiven without punishment with the Azazel goat ceremony on Yom Kippur, when we had the Holy Temple. Neither the Torah wisdom nor the angels can accept repentance therefore they could only answer the question by what is within their ability and understanding.*

3. *Regret what he did with a commitment never to do it again.*

4. *There is one Biblical commandment to repent for any and all sins, even if the sin is a violation of Rabbinical law and not Biblical law, since Biblically we are also required to follow Rabbinical decrees and laws.*

*To perform a mitzvah one need do an action. Verbal confession is considered an action providing that in his mind he regrets the sin and resolves never to repeat it again. If one repents many sins, for each sin, there is the same commandment to repent. Therefore, he performed the mitzvah of penitence many times.*

*How does a mute repent when he cannot repent verbally? He may write his confession, and this would also be considered an action of penitence. How does he repent on Yom Kippur when it is forbidden to write? This same question may be asked about one who is paralyzed and cannot talk or write. The answer is, that penitence is not bound to the mitzvah of repenting. As long as God understands that in his mind and heart he regrets the sin and will not repeat it again if given the opportunity to sin, he has repented even if he was unable to perform the mitzvah of penitence. Nevertheless, if he had the opportunity to repent before he became paralyzed, he must also repent the sin of not fulfilling the commandment to repent, because he may die without having the ability to fulfill this mitzvah.*

confession, which is a positive commandment.

How does one confess? He says, "I have sinned to you, my Creator, I have transgressed and committed iniquity before you by doing such-and-such. I regret, and I am ashamed of what I have done. I am committed<sup>5</sup> never to repeat this act." These are the fundamentals of Viduy (Confession of Sins). The more one confesses and elaborates<sup>6</sup>, the better.

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5. *In chapter II, law 8, in this work, the author states that in our prayer books there is a simple form of confession, we have sinned by doing so and so. As stated before, this amount of verbal confession is enough providing that in his mind and heart he regrets his sin and resolves never to repeat it.*

6. *Question, if one repents his sin and is forgiven, why is it important to elaborate and continue confessing? The answer is, that when one sins, repents, and is forgiven, he has not yet completely purified his body and soul which were spiritually contaminated through his sin. These defects are remedied through greater levels of penitence. Furthermore, even after being cleansed from the sin, it is still meritorious to confess the past sin so that he be constantly reminded never to repeat this action, because the one who has tasted sin is more prone to repeat it.*

*Rabbi Yona in his book of repentance titled "Shaarai T'shuvah," lists twenty levels of repentance. They are;*

- 1. One must regret his sin because he violated a commandment of God, not because of social reasons.*
- 2. One must commit himself under any circumstances, never again to violate this commandment of God.*
- 3. One should grieve that he did not obey the commandment of his Creator.*
- 4. One should feel pain that he did not obey the commandment of his Creator.*
- 5. One should be concerned about the punishment that will be meted out to him because he did not obey the commandment of his Creator.*
- 6. One should be embarrassed because he did not obey the commandment of his Creator.*
- 7. One should humble himself by adopting a humble personality until he completes his penitence. After penitence, he should adopt a mediocre personality.*
- 8. One should humble himself by living simply during his penitence. Afterwards he should adopt a middle class life style.*
- 9. One should attend to his physical needs with the objective of fulfilling mitzvos. Taking care of his health is a mitzvah, and further allows him to do more mitvos.*
- 10. The part of the body that did the sin should be trained to do more mitzvos. If his hand stole money, then the hand should be trained to give charity. If his lips spoke slander, then his lips should be trained to teach Torah.*
- 11. One should search his body, soul, and lifestyle in order to implement improvements and needed changes for him to become a God-fearing person.*
- 12. One should realize the seriousness of the sin through studying the type of punishment that is meted out for such a sin.*
- 13. One should realize that punishment for a sin is related to the degree that one does the misdeed. There are sins that may seem light sins because, if one repents, one is forgiven without punishment. Yet, if he does not repent, and if he sinned in order to anger God, his punishment may be more severe than one who violated a command whose punishment is death but if he repents, he is forgiven after suffering. Therefore, he should regard a light sin as a severe sin.*
- 14. One must verbally confess one's sin.*
- 15. One must pray to God to forgive one's sin.*
- 16. If one sinned between man, one must placate the person whom he wronged. If he caused him financial loss, he must repay him and ask his forgiveness. If he caused him anguish or embarrassment, he must ask his forgiveness.*
- 17. One should increase his charitable contributions and help people in need with good deeds and kindness.*
- 18. One should constantly repent his sin when appropriate, in order to remind himself not to repeat this misdeed.*
- 19. When one finds himself again in the same circumstances as he was when he sinned, and he did not sin, (this is the highest level of repentance according to Maimonides).*



Likewise, he who brings a sin or a guilt offerings (must also confess their unintentional or willful transgressions when they bring these offerings. Their sacrifice does not atone) for their sins unless they repent and verbally confess, as it is written, "He must confess the sin that he has committed." (Leviticus 5:5).

Similarly, people who are sentenced by the Rabbinical court to be executed, or to be lashed, do not attain atonement through their death<sup>7</sup> or lashing unless they repent and confess.

Likewise, someone who injures his fellow or damages his property, his sins are not forgiven even if he pays what he owes him, and is forgiven by the one he has wronged. He must confess to his Creator and resolve never to do such a thing again. As it is written, "When he is guilty of any of the sins of man." (Leviticus 5:5).

**[1:2]** The goat that is sent to Azazel is (likened to a sacrifice) for forgiveness for all Israel; therefore, the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) recites a verbal confession that includes all Israel, as it is written, "And he shall confess on it, all the transgressions of Israel." (Leviticus 16:21). This goat atones for all transgressions in the Torah<sup>8</sup>: both those punishable by death and not punishable by death; intentional sins and unintentional sins; those the

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20. One should become an activist and influence others to repent.

7. *The Rabbinical court tells the person to repent before he is executed, because there is no repentance after death, since after death there is no choice between good and evil. If he repents, then to complete the cleansing of his soul, he is executed, but his soul is still not cleansed until all his flesh has fallen from his bones. Therefore, he is not buried with righteous Jews until they are able to gather his bones without flesh and reinter these bones where righteous Jews are buried. If he does not repent, he is punished again after his execution.*

*According to this fact, that there is no longer any punishment for the body once the flesh has fallen from the bones, we must conclude that desecration of his grave thereafter does not constitute forgiveness for his sins. Therefore, it is a sin for the living to desecrate graves.*

*The rules of punishment pertaining to court ordered executions are not the same as with GOD'S judgement of the soul and body after death. If his sins were greater than his merits, he is sentenced to Gihennom for at least twelve months regardless of whether his flesh will fall from his bones before twelve months. After completing his punishment, his soul has become degraded, and he cannot enter the World to Come by his merits alone. It is by the merits of the righteous in the World to Come that he is allowed to enter. This alone is a degradation to his soul because he was created and born into this world in order to achieve on his own the merits that is needed to enter the World to Come, and he failed. However, he still merits a small portion of the World to Come with the limited merits that he has acquired in this world. This is not the same with the heretics, who have no share in the World to Come. Their judgment is to pay them in this world for whatever good they may have done, and to punish them after death until the end of days, when the dead will be resurrected, and GOD will then terminate Gihennom. These souls will then enter the World to Come only by the merits of the righteous without any merits of their own, therefore they do not have any portion of their own in the World to Come. This is in contrast to those whose sins are greater than their merits, who do have a small portion of their own in the World to Come, as explained. If, however, a heretic receives merits after his death because he taught students the proper way before he became a heretic, and for the good they do due to his influence after his death, he is rewarded after death. These merits remain with him and then he also will have a small portion of his own in the World to Come. There are recorded cases where due to the good deeds of one's children one's sentence was shortened.*

8. *When we had the Holy Temple, God was much more merciful with us because of the numerous righteous people who merited the Holy Temple. Therefore, through the Azazel goat ceremony God forgavethose who repented without punishment. Today, we do not have a Holy Temple and there is no Azazel goat ceremony, and many transgressions require punishment in addition to repentance for forgiveness.*

transgressor is aware of, and those of which he is unaware. This applies only if one repents. If one does not repent, the goat atones only for the light sins<sup>9</sup>. What are light sins, and what are grave sins? Grave sins are those for which one incurs the death penalty by the court or *kareis* (premature death). False and vain oaths are also considered grave sins, although they are not punished by *kareis* (premature death). Light sins are the violation of the other prohibitions and (the failure to perform) positive commandments that are not punishable by *kareis* (premature death).

[1:3] Now that the *Beis Hamikdash* (Holy Temple) is not standing, and there is no sacrificial altar for atonement, we are only left with repentance<sup>10</sup>. Through repentance, God forgives our sins, and no mention is made of these sins even if one sinned one's whole life and repented only in his final moments. As it is written, "The wickedness of the wicked will not cause him to stumble when he turns back from his wickedness." (Ychezkiel 33:12).

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9. *If he does not repent then he cannot be forgiven, because there is a rule that one who sins and says that, "I have no need to repent because I will be forgiven on Yom Kippur", he is not forgiven at all. Furthermore, why should someone who does not ask to be forgiven, be forgiven.*

*We must conclude that this is not a situation where one knows that he sinned and refuses to repent. The Azazel goat helps those who forgot their sin or who did not realize that they sinned, and these people repented on Yom Kippur the sins that they were aware of. This is because God knows his mind and assess that if he was told about these sins he would repent them. Nevertheless there is no actual repentance for these sins. Therefore, his forgiveness is compromised, and he is forgiven for the lighter sins without punishment, and for the grave sins he is forgiven after punishment. However, the punishment for the grave sins are considerably reduced because of the Azazel goat ceremony on Yom Kippur.*

10. *One who willfully refuses to repent a sin cannot be forgiven before death even if he suffered by the hand of God or was executed by Rabbinical court. After death his punishment is completed in order to cleanse his soul. A sin is forgiven when one asks forgiveness, if not, he must be cleansed of sin. Punishment cleanses sin but does not forgive sin. If one repents a severe sin, he is partially forgiven and the punishment completes cleansing his soul.*

*After the destruction of the Holy Temple, since there is no Azazel ceremony, one can only pray to God to have mercy on him and forgive the sins of which he is unaware. This is prayer and not penitence. God will forgive, and depending on the circumstances he may also punish him to cleanse his soul.*

*If he was executed by a Rabbinical court without repenting, his execution can help to change a decree that banished him from the World to Come, to meriting the World to Come through the righteous in the World to Come, after he is punished after death to cleanse his soul. So is the ruling with a city in Israel that rebels and worships idols. The decree on the inhabitants of that city is that they will not enter the World to Come. However, if the Rabbinical court sent in the military to punish them, their death by a ruling of a Rabbinical court will change their decree and they will enter the World to Come after their souls are punished after death.*

*If, however, the idolatrous city was destroyed by a foreign enemy and not by a ruling of a Rabbinical court, this type of death cleanses their souls and they avoid punishment after death. Nevertheless, they lack mitzvos to merit them in the World to Come, and can only merit the World to Come through the merits of the righteous in the World to Come.*

*These rules do not apply to those who are killed by Heaven even if their death was premature, severe, and unusual. An example of this is the rebellion of Korach and his cohorts discussed before, and the representatives of the ten tribes who rebelled against Moses and told the Hebrews not to enter the land of Israel. These people were punished with premature, severe, and unusual death, and yet because they did not repent they will not enter the World to Come.*

The day of Yom Kippur<sup>11</sup> in and of itself atones for those who repent<sup>12</sup>, as it is written, "This day will bring about atonement for you." (Leviticus 16:30).

**[1:4]** Although repentance amends one's sins, and the day of Yom Kippur itself brings about atonement, (there are different degrees of sins, and accordingly, different stages of atonement). Some sins can be rectified at once, while others need the passage of time. What are these categories?

If a person violates a positive commandment is not punishable by *kareis* (premature death)<sup>13</sup>, and he repents, he is forgiven immediately. Regarding these sins it is written, "Turn back, O rebellious children, I will heal your disobedient acts!" (Jerimiyah 3:22).

If a person violates a negative commandment not punishable by *kareis* (premature death) or death and repents, his forgiveness must wait for Yom Kippur to completely atone for the sin.

If he violates a commandment that is punishable by *kareis* (premature death) or death<sup>14</sup> and repents, Yom Kippur and suffering pain<sup>15</sup> will be needed to complete his atonement. He will not be forgiven completely until he is inflicted with pain, for it is written, "I will punish their transgression with the rod." (Psalms 89:33).

This applies to transgressions that do not involve desecration of God's name. Someone who desecrated God's name is forgiven through repentance, Yom Kippur, suffering pain, and death<sup>16, 17</sup>. For it is written, "The Lord of Hosts revealed Himself to my ears. This iniquity shall never be atoned until you die." (Yeshayahu 22:14).

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11. *The holiness of the day of Yom Kippur torments the soul if it sinned, and added to this is the fasting and other abstentions of Yom kippur. There are sins that are pending Yom Kippur for forgiveness after repentance because that day God forgives sins.*

12. *After the destruction of the Holy Temple, what does one do to be forgiven for sins that he does not know about and cannot repent? One should pray for mercy to be forgiven for these sins as is printed in the Yom Kippur prayer books. He should study Torah and halacha in order to know what is sin. He should teach Torah to others. He should give charity and help others. He should pray on the Jewish fast days to be forgiven for sins that are not known to him.*

13. *The mitzvah of circumcision and sacrificing the Pascal lamb is punishable by kareis.*

14. *Without repentance there is no forgiveness, only cleansing of the soul through punishment. One who does not know that he sinned but repents those sins that he is aware of, and asks for mercy to be forgiven for the sins that he is unaware of, will be forgiven for those sins although he did not repent of them. He may also be punished to complete the cleansing of his body and soul.*

15. *There is a dual purpose for man to suffer. One, is to cleanse the body and soul if one sinned. If the person is righteous and does not deserve punishment, God may use his suffering as a sacrificial altar to somewhat cleanse the sins of the generation in order to prevent their destruction. The second purpose is, to test the individual's faith in his Creator and to see how well he will practice the halacha when suffering. This is what God explained to Job when he complained that he was a righteous person who was suffering and did not deserve to suffer. Their reward is greatly increased through this type of suffering.*

16. *He dies either before his time or through an unnatural death.*

17. *Moses our teacher was punished to die before entering the Holy Land because he did not sanctify God by fulfilling His commandment to speak to the rock to bring forth water.*

## CHAPTER TWO

### ***WHAT IS REPENTANCE***

**[2:1]** What is the highest degree of penitence<sup>18</sup>? When one sins and repents and thereafter finds himself once again in circumstances similar to the one he was in previously when he sinned, with the same ability to sin<sup>19</sup>, yet this time he refrains from sinning. An example of this is, a person who had sexual relations with a forbidden woman and repented. Later, they are secluded together again, in the same location, and his attraction to her and his physical vigor remain unchanged, yet this time he refrains from sinning. King Solomon wrote about such circumstances in (Ecclesiastes 12:1), "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before those days of sorrow come and those years arrive when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them."

If he does not repent until he is old, lacking the ability to do what he used to do, his repentance is not on a high level. Even if he transgressed his entire life, repenting only on his deathbed, all his sins are forgiven, as the previous verse continues, "Before the sun, the light, the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds come back after the rain," (Ecclesiastes 12:2), which refers to the day of death. The verse implies, that, if one remembers his Creator and repents before he dies, he is forgiven.

**[2:2]** What is repentance? repentance is when one who sinned now refrains from doing the sin, and he removes it from his thoughts and resolves never to commit it again. As it is written, "Let the wicked give up his ways." (Yeshayahu 55:7). He must also regret his past misdeeds, as it is written, "Now that I have turned back, I am filled with remorse." (Jerimiyah 31:18). His sincerity must be to the degree that our Creator, who knows man's innermost thoughts, can testify, that this person will never repeat this sin. As it is written, "Return to G-d, say before Him. . . never again will we call our handiwork our god." (Hoshea 14:4). He must verbalize his confession, clearly articulating his heart's resolve.

**[2:3]** Whoever merely verbalizes his confession without consciously deciding to give up his sins is like a person who immerses in a ritual pool *mikvah* in order to cleanse himself, but is holding a dead reptile<sup>20</sup> (such as a turtle

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18. In footnote no. 7, there are twenty "midos" (character traits such as modesty, honesty,) of penitence listed. This does not necessarily mean that they are degrees of penitence having a hierarchy. The highest degree of penitence is when our Creator is convinced that he has no intentions of violating the commandment again. It is not enough for him to regret his action but he must repent the violation of the commandment and resolve never to violate it even if he finds himself in a situation where the temptation to violate this commandment would be greater than it was when he committed his sin. Therefore, if one does not repeat the sin in the same original situation, his repentance is not necessarily complete, and this is not the highest degree of penitence, because degrees of penitence reflect how much closer is the person getting to convince his Creator that he will never again violate the commandment. This situation is the highest character trait of penitence. Character traits of penitence enhance the degrees of penitence. If one regrets his deed and resolves never to repeat this sin, yet he did not fully convince his Creator about his intentions, this is partial penitence, and he is partially absolved from the punishment associated with this sin, and his body and soul are partially cleansed from the sin.

Why should one constantly confess after complete repentance? The answer is, confessing his sin after he has completed repentance is like a fence to prevent him from repeating his sin, by constantly reminding himself not to sin. To convince the public to repent is also like a fence to prevent him from sin. One should first repent before he convinces others to repent. If one did not sanctify God (*chillul hashem*), and he now sanctifies Him through convincing the public to repent, he may have his death sentence revoked.

19. If one did not sanctify God by choosing death instead of idol worship, he can reach this degree of repentance only if he is again put in to this position and he chooses to die rather than worship idols.

20. If a person merely regrets his past action by saying, I am sorry that I had to do it and I may be forced to do it again. Or if he says, I am sorry that I cheated this person because it is against the law. This is not considered regretting his sin, and cannot be

or a lizard) in his hand. His immersion is will not cleanse himself as long as the reptile remains in his hand. And so it is written, "He who confesses and turns away from his sins will find mercy." (Proverbs 28:13).

One must describe the sins he is repenting of, (the same way Moses repented for Israel for the sin of the golden calf) as it is written, "The people have committed a terrible sin by making a golden deity." (Exodus 32:31).

**[2:4]** The path of repentance is for the repentant to constantly cry out in prayer to God, weeping and pleading to forgive his sins, and to give charity according to his ability, and to stay as far away as possible from the situation that caused him to sin. Also, to figuratively change his name, as if to say, "I am a different person and not the same one that sinned." Also to change his behavior, doing good and following the path of the righteous, and to change his address. Exile atones for sin because it makes a person submissive and humble.

**[2:5]** As explained before, there are sins between people, and sins between man and his creator. Regarding sins between people<sup>21</sup>, it is highly commendable for the repentant to confess his sins before a group of people, and to reveal the transgressions he committed against others. He should say, "I have sinned against so-and-so, committing the following wrongful acts ... I repent and express my regret." If, out of pride, one hides his sins, not revealing them, he will not have completed his repentance, as it is written, "He who covers up his faults will not succeed." (Proverbs 28:13).

Regarding sins between man and his Creator, one should not reveal these transgressions. To reveal these sins is an act of impudence. Rather, he should repent before God, specifying his sins. Publicly, he should make a general confession<sup>22</sup> He is also blessed if he does not to reveal his sins, for it is written, "Happy is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered over." (Psalms 32:1).

**[2:6]** Although repentance and prayer are welcome at all times, they are even more desirable during the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. During this period, repentance is accepted immediately, as it is written, "Seek God (at a time) when He can be found." (Yeshayahu 55:6). However, when a community repents at any time, crying out from the depth of their hearts, they are answered immediately, as it is written, "What nation is so great that they have God close to it, as the Lord our God is, whenever we call Him." (Deuteronomy

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*compared to one who did an action and immersed in the mikva. If he says, I regret my sin because I went against a commandment of God, this is considered repenting the past sin. However, if his resolve is weak and he cannot build up enough courage to commit himself not to fall to temptation, this is considered that he did partial repentance, and it can be compared to one who immersed in a mikvah while holding a reptile, neither the mikvah nor the penitence has any effect because he did not complete the mitzvah.*

21. *Regarding sins between people he should confess his sin before others, even if they are not aware of his sin. Regarding sins between man and his Creator, he must not confess his sin before others even if they are aware of his sin. This is referring to telling how he committed the sin. General public confession is printed in our prayer books. These sins should be confidential and one should feel embarrassed to confess them before others even if they are aware of the sin. On the other hand, sins between people are not so confidential because one must appease the one who he wronged by paying for the losses that he caused him, and by asking his forgiveness even if he must do so in public. Therefore, he may confess his sin before a group and repent.*

*The commentary on Maimonides, the Ravad, disagrees with one point, and is of the opinion that regarding sins between man and his Creator, if the sin is known one may confess them before others. The commentary on Maimonides, the Kesef Mishneh (Bais Yosef), explains the disagreement between Maimonides and Ravad differently.*

22. *As is printed in the Yom Kippur prayer books.*

4:7).

### ***YOM KIPPUR, THE DAY OF ATONEMENT:***

**[2:7]** Yom Kippur is a time of repentance for all, both for individuals and communities. It is a deadline for forgiveness and atonement for Israel. Therefore, everyone is required to repent and confess on Yom Kippur<sup>23</sup>. The *mitzvah* of confession on Yom Kippur begins before the start of Yom Kippur, before one eats the last meal before the fast. The reason that we begin penitence early, is that we fear perhaps an accident may occur when eating the meal<sup>24</sup> and he will not have a chance to repent on Yom Kippur. He repents again in the evening prayer service of Yom Kippur, repeating the repentance prayer service in the morning and again in the Musaf, afternoon, and Ne'ilah, services.

At which point in the service should one confess? An individual confesses after the last blessing in the Shemoneh Esrei, while the cantor recites the confession during the Shemoneh Esrei, in the fourth blessing.

**[2:8]** The Viduy (prayer of confession) traditionally recited by all Israel is: "For we have all sinned," is the essential part of the Viduy.

Sins that he confessed on a previous Yom Kippur should be confessed on future Yom Kippurs, though he did not repeat the sin, as it is written, "For I recognize my transgressions, and am always conscious of my sin." (Psalms 51:5).

**[2:9]** Repentance and Yom Kippur atone only for sins between man and God such as the sins of eating forbidden food or engaging in forbidden sexual relations, and the like. They do not atone for sins between people such as injuring someone, cursing someone, robbing someone etc. These sins are not forgiven until he pays what is owed to the person he wronged and asks his forgiveness.

If a person hurt someone's feelings by what he said, he must placate him and approach him again and again until he forgives him. If he does not want to forgive him, he should approach him with a group of three friends, asking his forgiveness. If this is not enough to appease him, he should return a second and a third time. If he still does not want to forgive him, he is not required to beg forgiveness any more, and the person who refused to forgive him is now the sinner. However, if he was his teacher, the offender should continue seeking his forgiveness even a thousand times, until he says, "I forgive you."

**[2:10]** A person is forbidden to stubbornly refuse to forgive a repentant person who seeks forgiveness for his sins. One should be easy to appease and hard to anger. When the person who wronged him asks forgiveness, he should forgive him wholeheartedly and willingly. Even if he was grievously wronged, he should neither seek revenge nor bear a grudge against the offender. Forgiveness is the way of the Jewish people (who follow the

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23. *There is no commandment to repent on Yom Kippur. There is a general commandment to repent, and as long as he is able to repent he does not violate this commandment. However, one who puts off repenting, violates a rule that one may not put off performing a mitzvah. On Yom Kippur, the day set aside for repenting, he has a special obligation to repent, as stated in the Bible. This means that he especially must not put off the mitzvah of repenting on Yom Kippur, and if so, he violated the obligation to repent on Yom Kippur.*

24. *The explanation for this ordinance is found in the Mishnah Pirkai Avos, and brought in this work in chapter 7, law 2. They bring a compelling reason why one should not put off the mitzvah of repentance even for one day. The reason is, that a person does not know his time of death, therefore, he may die on the day that he sinned, and if he died without repenting he will be punished after death. On the eve of Yom Kippur everyone is supposed to be on this level of penitence and repent before eating the last meal for fear that he may not be able to do so afterwards.*

Bible and Talmud). By contrast, idol worshipers are insensitive, and do not possess this quality. They neither forgive nor forget. Indeed, because the Gibeonites did not forgive and refused to be placated, it is written about them, "The Gibeonites were not descendants of Jews." (Samuel II, 21:2).

**[2:11]** If the person whom he insulted, or caused damage to, died before the offender asked his forgiveness, he should bring ten people to the grave and say, "I have sinned against the God of Israel and against this person by doing the following (and I beg his forgiveness)." If he owed him money, he should return it to the heirs. If he does not know who the heirs are, he should deposit the money with the Rabbinical court, confessing his sin<sup>25</sup>.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

### ***MITZVOS AND SINS***

**[3:1]** Every person has merits and sins, (the righteous do *mitzvos* but sometimes do not). If a person's merits are greater than his sins, he is considered a righteous person. If his sins are greater than his merits, he is considered a sinful person. If his merits and sins are equal, he is called a *beinoni*<sup>26</sup> (half righteous half sinner). The same applies for an entire country, if the total merits of its dwellers are greater than their sins, the country is judged righteous. If their sins are greater, the country is judged wicked. The same is true for the continents and for the entire world<sup>27</sup>.

**[3:2]** If a person's sins are greater than his merits, he is sentenced to die<sup>28</sup>. For it is written, "I have struck you ... because your sins were so many." (Jerimiyah 30:14). A country whose sins are greater than their merits will be sentenced to devastation, as it is written, "The painful cries (of the oppressed) in Sodom and Amorah<sup>29</sup> are

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25. *The court will keep the money in trust for the heirs, or if there are no heirs, distribute it at their discretion.*

26. *When God our Creator judges an individual, the accuracy of weighing the scale is so fine that it is almost impossible for an individual's sins and merits to be equal. However, the mercy of God will tilt the scale for someone whose merits are somewhat less than his sins if he also was kind and gave charity and helped people in need. Sometimes the scale will be tilted to the middle, and he will be considered a *beinoni*, and sometimes the scale is tilted to the right side of the merits.*

27. *As was the case with Noah and the flood.*

28. *The literal translation is "he will die immediately". If so, then all evil people will die the day after Yom Kippur. We must conclude that the term "death" in this context means, not to merit the World to Come on his own. The actual time of his death will vary accordingly. The purpose of creating the human being and having him born, into this world is for him to merit the World to Come on his own by choosing to follow the path of the Torah. If he failed his test and does not merit the World to Come on his own but only through the merits of the righteous, then he is to be compared to a poor person who lives off charity, and a poor person is considered a dead person. Therefore, so long as his sins are greater than his merits, then he is considered a dead person because he did not fulfill his purpose in this world, and it would have been better not to have been born, and he is too poor in merits to merit the World to Come on his own.*

*As long as he has not been fully paid in this world, he has an argument not to die. However, he may receive a large payment quickly, and die immediately afterwards. He may have been paid in full and yet not die because God may feel that there is a probability that he will repent, or that God desires to punish people through his evil ways. We have seen totally ruthless people make an entire nation suffer. Sometimes, God lets him live in order to increase his sins and punishment.*

29. *Maimonides states that the decision to destroy the provinces of Sodom and Amorah were because their sins were greater than*

great<sup>30</sup>. . ." (Genesis 18:20). The same judgment is for the entire world. If the sins of mankind would be greater than their merits, they would be sentenced to devastation. As it is written regarding the great flood in the time of Noah, "God saw that man's wickedness on earth had increased." (Genesis 6:5).

The calculation (of merits and sins) is not based on the number of good and bad deeds. The calculation is based on the amount of sincerity and vigilance that he did the deed with. He may have done a merit that outweighs many sins, as it is written, "For in him alone, a good quality was found." (Kings I, 14:13).<sup>31</sup> The prophet Achiyah Hashiloni predicted that the children of the wicked king Yerovam would die and be eaten by dogs. However his son Aviyah died, and merited to be buried and mourned by Israel, "because in him alone a good quality was found." The Talmud in Moed Katan 28b explains that, although Aviyah followed in his evil father's footsteps, he had one great merit. He called off the guards his father had installed to prevent the people from going to Jerusalem for the Yamim Tovim. This merit earned him the privilege of burial.

Oppositely, he may have done a sin that outweighs many merits, as it is written, "A single error destroys much of value." (Ecclesiastes 9:18). The weighing of merits and sins is done according to the wisdom of God our Creator. (He does not entrust these decisions to any of his creations.)

**[3:3]** Oppositely, one can regret and repent the good deeds that one has done just as one can repent the bad deeds that he has done, and all his *mitzvos* will be lost<sup>32</sup> as if he never did them. By saying to himself, "What did

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*their merits. However, in Genesis chapter 18, Abraham begs God to have mercy on them if there are ten righteous people amongst them who stood up against their evil deeds and chastised them. People who see others do evil and mind their own business, may be punished with the rest of them as accomplices to their crimes.*

*If ten righteous people in a province are enough to save them from punishment, how then throughout Jewish history were cities destroyed and Jewish communities uprooted although there were more than ten righteous people among them? The difference between them is, that with Sodom and Amorah the punishment was total destruction, similar to the flood during the period of Noah. Abraham did not beg God to forgive their sins and not punish them. Abraham asked God not to totally destroy them if there were ten righteous people among them, but only to punish them for their sins.*

30. *It is well-known from the Talmud and Medrash that generations before their destruction the sins of Sodom and Amorah were greater than their merits. So why were they not punished then? The answer is, that when their sins are cruelty to mankind, God did not destroy them immediately until after being fully paid for whatever good that they may have done, and in order that their sins should multiply to deserve total destruction. Punishment of a country may be any suffering that is brought on them as a country, such as war and invasion, a famine or a plague. This punishment atones for their sins so that afterwards their merits become greater than their sins. Then, their judgement begins anew.*

31. *The prophet Achiyah Hashiloni predicted that the children of the wicked king Yerovam would die and be eaten by dogs. However, his son Aviyah died, and merited to be buried and mourned by Israel, "because in him alone a good quality was found." The Talmud in Moed Katan 28b explains that, although Aviyah followed in his evil father's footsteps, he had one great merit. He called off the guards his father had installed to prevent the people from going to Jerusalem for the Yamim Tovim. This merit earned him the privilege of burial.*

32. *The world was created with positive and negative or good and the ability to do evil. Therefore, if one repents, the sin is erased from the books. Oppositely, if one regrets doing a mitzvah, the mitzvah is erased from the books. If, however, he does not accept upon himself never to do this mitzvah again, but leaves open the option to do it in the future, this is not considered totally regretting doing the mitzvah, and the mitzvah is not lost. A person who regrets doing mitzvos and who accepts upon himself not to do mitzvos, this person will not be rewarded any mitzvos even if he helped people in need. Nevertheless, he will be paid for his kindness in this world so as not to see the World to Come.*



I gain by doing them? I wish I had not done them," he loses all of his *mitzvos*. As it is written, "The righteousness of the righteous will not serve him when he transgresses." (Yechezkiel 33:12). This applies only to a person who regrets his previous (good) deeds.

Just as the merits and sins of each Jew are weighed at the time of his death, so too, are his merits and sins weighed every year on Rosh Hashanah. If one is found righteous, his verdict for life is sealed. If one is found wicked, his verdict for death is sealed. The verdict of the *beinony* (one whose merits and sins are equal) remains pending until Yom Kippur. If he repents, his verdict for life is sealed. If not, his verdict for death is sealed.

### ***THE MESSAGE OF THE SHOFAR***

[3:4] Although the *mitzvah* of blowing the shofar (ram's horn) on Rosh Hashanah is a *chok*, (a *mitzvah* for which we are not given a reason)<sup>33</sup>, nevertheless, it also contains this message, "Wake up from your sleep with the sounding of the shofar alarm, you sleepers! Arise from your slumber, you slumberers! Examine your deeds! Return to God! Remember your Creator!" Those of you who forget the truth with the futilities of the times and spend all year in vanity and emptiness, look into your souls, improve your ways and your deeds. Let each of you abandon your evil ways and immoral thoughts.

Accordingly, throughout the year, a person should view himself and his relationship to the entire world as if his good and bad deeds are evenly balanced. By performing one sin, he tips his own scale and that of the entire world to the side of guilt, bringing punishment upon himself and the whole world. Conversely, if he performs one *mitzvah*, he tips his scale and that of the entire world to the side of merit, bringing redemption and deliverance to himself and others. As it is written, "A righteous man is the foundation of the world." (Proverbs 10:25) Meaning, that a person who acts virtuously tips the scale of the entire world to the side of merit and saves it.

It is therefore customary for all Israel to increase their charitable donations<sup>34</sup>, performing more good

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33. *The kabbalah gives an explanation for this mitzvah. The ram's horn is a remembrance of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and a remembrance of their devotion to God, and of the promises made to them regarding their future generations. The ram was sacrificed by Abraham instead of Isaac.*

*We blow three basic sounds from the shofar. The Tekiya is a long sound, representing the attribute of Abraham, kindness (chesed), waiting a long time for a sinner to repent instead of punishing him right away. The Teruah is a short sound, representing the attribute of Isaac, strict justice (din), and not having much patience with sinners. The Shevorim sound is middle length, between the lengths of the Tekiyah and Teruah, representing the attribute of Jacob, mercy (rachamim), between kindness and strict justice. This attribute was created at the akaida when Abraham prepared Isaac for a sacrifice, in order that the two opposite attributes chesed and din may coexist.*

*The order of blowing the ram's horn is in three units; Tekiyah Shevarim Tekiya, Tekiya Teruah Tekiya. Tekiya Shevorim-Teruah Tekiya. The Tekiya or attribute of kindness precedes and ends each unit, as a remembrance to judge us with kindness on Rosh Hashonah, the day of judgment.*

34. *The sefer (religious book) titled "Chyai Adam", states that sometimes on Yom Kippur God enters a decree about a person that is for many years. An example is, when a lingering illness is decreed on a person, or it is decreed that the person start a new enterprise. In these cases the individual is judged on the following Rosh Hashanah if to change the original decree.*

*In Deuteronomy chapter 21, the Bible requires a type of sacrifice called Eglah Arufah to forgive the sins of the people in the vicinity of a murder who may have been able to prevent it, and also to atone for the souls of the dead who may have been able to prevent the murder by properly educating the generation. This is a ruling that ascribes the dead with complicity in the sins of people after death. The Eglah Arufah has an advantage over the Azazel goat type of sacrifice because the sin is forgiven immediately, for both*

deeds and *mitzvos* between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur than during the rest of the year. During these ten days, it is customary to wake up early in the morning when it is still dark and say *Selichos* (prayers of repentance and forgiveness,) with a penitent heart.

### ***THE SCALE OF JUSTICE***

**[3:5]** When a person is judged and his merits are weighed against his sins, his first two sins are not weighed. (Rosh Hashanna 17b). The judgment begins from the third sin. If his sins still outweigh his merits, then the first two sins are now added to the total sins, and he is punished for all his sins. If he is a *beinony* and his merits are equal to his sins which were judged starting with the third one, he is judged as if his merits are greater than his sins by the following procedure. His third sin now counts as the first sin, for the two previous sins were already forgiven. Then this third sin is not counted because it now became the first sin, and the first two sins are not counted. This procedure continues until his last becomes the first sin and is also not counted.

However, if one of the sins of the *beinony* was never to put on or wear tefillin, he is judged starting with his first sin. Even if he was judged a sinner and punished after death, he may still be worthy to participate in the World to Come.

Likewise, the wicked whose sins are greater than their merits are judged according to their sins, but they may participate in the World to Come. For all Israel have a share in the World to Come, as it is written, "And your people, all of them righteous, shall possess the land forever." (Yeshayahu 60:21). "The land," is a figurative term for "the land of life," which is the World to Come.

Similarly, the pious of the nations of the world (i.e., the gentiles who keep the seven universal laws given to Noah) may participate in the World to Come.

The above methods of judgment are applied to an individual. For it is written, "Truly, God does all these things two or three times to a man." (Job 33:29). However, when judging a community, their first, second and third sins are left pending, as it is written, "For three transgressions of Israel (I will withhold punishment), but for four, I will not." (Amos 2:6). Therefore, the judgment begins with the fourth sin.

### ***PEOPLE WHO HAVE NO SHARE IN THE WORLD TO COME***

**[3:6]** Jews who do the following sins, do not participate in the World to Come. Instead, their souls are cut off (from their attachment to God) and lost, and they are judged (to remain in Gehinom, Hell) for a very long time.

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*the living and the souls, and they do not have to wait until Yom Kippur. Since God is all merciful, we can conclude that if the souls need forgiveness for not properly educating those whom they had the ability to educate, how much more is the reward for those who did properly educate the generation, and that the soul receives added merits after death! The problem is, that after the destruction of the Holy Temple there are no sacrifices to atone for sin, only penitence can help forgive sin, and there is no repentance after death, therefore, how is the soul judged for sins that they have complicity with, and are done after death?*

*God is kind and is kind with others. Therefore, if God was kind to the soul and placed it in Gan Eden, waiting to enter the World to Come, then God will look for reasons not to punish the soul that is in Gan Eden. The Bais Yosef commentary on the Tur Shulchan Aruch, chapter 621, explains the basis of our custom to say a prayer for the souls, (Yizkor, El Molai Rachamim, Kaddish), and donating charity. In the merit of the mitzvah of charity that the living gives, God should accept his prayer and forgive the soul of the dead person. It is also a custom by many to pray for all souls, because many have no surviving relatives, or relatives who are not worthy of these prayers.*

*After the soul has entered Gan Eden, the punishment for complicity with sins done after death is meted out there by receiving less reward until these sins are forgiven. If the soul has not yet entered Gan Eden, if his complicity is with many severe sins done after death, he may be prevented from entering Gan Eden, and he will be punished for these sins in Gaihenom.*

The *minim* (described in [3:7], the *epikursim* (described in [3:7], people who deny the Torah, people who deny that God will return the dead to life (insert his soul into a newly recreated human body), people who do not believe in the coming of a Jewish Messiah (dedicated to enforcing the laws of the Bible and Talmud), people who rebel against God and cause the masses to sin, people who disassociate themselves from the Jewish community, people who sin in public, as Yehoyakim did<sup>35</sup>, informers or people who unjustly give information about a Jew to the non-Jewish authorities for them to cause him harm, people who intimidate the community for their own purposes, murderers, slanderers, one who stretches his foreskin (in order to appear uncircumcised).

[3:7] Five categories of heretics are called *minim*. They are: one who says there is no God nor is there a spiritual ruler of the creation: one who accepts that the creation has spiritual rulers but insists that there are two or more spiritual rulers: one who believes that there is only one God who rules nature, but he is a physical existence<sup>36</sup> not a spiritual existence; and likewise, one who denies that God was forever and will be forever and Creator of all that exists; one who worships a star, constellation, or something else, as a mediator between himself and God. Each of these five heretics is called a *min*.

[3:8] Three categories of heretics are called *epicursim*<sup>37</sup>. They are: one who denies that prophecy exists and believes that there is no communication from G-d to man: one who denies that Moses our teacher was a prophet: one who believes that God is not aware of man's deeds. These three categories of heretics are called *epicurusim*.

Three categories of heretics are called *kofrim*. They are: one who says the Torah, or even one verse or word of the Torah, is not Divine, or one who says that the Bible and the Oral Law were not given by God to Moses, but that Moses was the author of the Bible and the Oral Law; one who denies that the Talmud and oral law are the divine interpretation of the Bible, or one who questions the authority of the teachers of our Torah, such as Tzadok and Beitos did; one who says that, although the Torah came from God, He replaced one law with another, and abolished the Torah as it was given originally, as other religions contend (even if they call themselves branches of Judaism.) Each of these three heretical beliefs is considered "one who denies the Torah."

[3:9] Two kinds of sinners amongst Jews are called *mumrim*. One is a *mumar* of a single *mitzvah* and the other is a *mumar* of the entire Torah. A *mumar* to a single *mitzvah*, is one who habitually and intentionally commits a specific sin in order to anger his Creator, and thereby gaining a reputation for routinely doing it, even if the sin is not a major sin (i.e., not punishable by *kareis* (premature death). For example, one who routinely wears *shaatnez* (a garment made of a mixture of wool and linen), or cuts off his sideburns, as if to say, this *mitzvah* does not exist for him. A *mumar* regarding the entire Torah is, for example, one who was forced to convert to another religion because of an evil decree<sup>38</sup> saying, "What good is it to remain a Jew when Jews are scorned and

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35. He said, "My forefathers did not know how to incite God's anger. I will show you how to infuriate Him." (Sanhedrin 103b).

36. The commentary Ravad criticizes the wording of Maimonides, that he should not have made a general statement condemning all those who have erred in this concept to the status of a *min*. However, Maimonides is of the opinion that he is erroneously a *min*, and cannot be regarded as a believer.

37. These are Jews who believe in one spiritual Creator but do not believe in basic beliefs of the Jewish religion.

38. Maimonides is explaining, that where there is evidence that he joined the non-Jews because of an evil decree, and not

persecuted? I am better off with those who have the upper hand." Such a person is a *mumar* regarding the entire Torah.

**[3:10]** (Referring to [3:6]) "Those that cause the masses to sin," include both those who cause others to commit grave sins, as Yeravam, Tzadok, and Beitus did, and those who cause others to commit light sins (not punishable by death), even if only to prevent them from performing a positive commandment. The term "cause others to sin," includes both people who physically force others to sin, such as Menasheh who killed Jews who refused to worshiped idols, and those who mislead others to sin.

**[3:11]** (Referring to [3:6]) A person who disassociates himself from the Jewish community in mind and in body, is one who isolates himself by not fulfilling *mitzvos* together with the community, nor sharing in their suffering, nor joining in their communal fasts. Rather, he goes off on his own as if he were an outsider and not a part of the Jewish nation. Such a person does not participate in the World to Come, even if he has not committed any sins.

People who openly commit sins, boasting about it, as Yehoyakim did, do not participate in the World to Come, whether they commit minor sins or grave ones. Such a person is referred to as a "perverter of the Torah," for he acted brazenly, showing outright contempt for the Torah, without shame.

**[3:12]** (Referring to [3:6]) There are two types of informers. The first is one who causes a Jew bodily harm by unjustly informing against him to the gentile authorities in order that he be killed or beaten. The second is one who causes a Jew monetary loss by informing against him to the non-Jewish authorities, or to a criminal, in order that they take his possessions. Neither of the two has a share in the World to Come.

**[3:13]** (Referring to [3:6]) "People who intimidate the community for their own purposes," refers to people who tyrannize the community, making them fear them. They do this for their own glory, without any ambition (to advance) God's honor. A fitting example are, despotic kings.

**[3:14]** The twenty-four people listed above will not participate in the World to Come, even if they are Jews.

There are other sins that are not as grave as those mentioned. Nevertheless, our Sages said a person who habitually commits them will not participate in the World to Come. Though these sins are usually taken lightly, our sages recommend that people be careful to avoid them. They are; calling a person by an insulting name or nickname; embarrassing someone in public; taking pride in someone else's shame; embarrassing a Torah scholar; embarrassing his teacher; disgracing the festivals, and desecrating holy objects of the *Beis Hamikdash*<sup>39</sup>. All the persons mentioned above do not participate in the World to Come if they die without repenting. However, if such a person repents before he dies, he will participate in the World to Come because not sin can stand in the way of repentance. Even if one denied God's existence all his life and repented only in his final moments, he may participate in the World to Come. For it is written, "Peace, peace, for the far and the

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*because he believes in their heresy, he must not be labeled a min or non believer, but it is obvious that he cannot be a practicing Jew in his situation, therefore he is labeled a mumar. The commentary Ravad disagrees, and is of the opinion that one who joins these people will worship with them, therefore, he is a min (heretic) even if at the beginning he did it because of an evil decree, there is no reason to assume that he was not later influenced by them to believe in their religion.*

39. For example, causing a sacrifice to become unfit.

near, says God, and I will heal them." (Yeshayahu 57:19). Any wicked person or apostate, who repents, whether publicly or privately, will be accepted, as it is written, "Turn back, O rebellious children." (Jerimiyah 3:22). Even if he is still somewhat rebellious, as evidenced by the fact that he repented in private rather than in public, his repentance will be accepted (to the degree that he repented, but not completely).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ***DEEDS THAT IMPEDE REPENTANCE***

**[4:1]** There are twenty four sins and bad character traits that stand in the way of repentance. Four of them, are sins so grave, God does not give the one who commits them an opportunity to repent, (but He <sup>40</sup>does not take away his ability to repent. God does not show him mercy to specially help him repent.) They are:

1) One who causes the masses to sin. Included in this category is a person who prevents them from performing a *mitzvos*.

2) One who leads his neighbor astray; for example, by persuading him to abandon the teachings of the Torah.

3) One who sees his son turn away from the teachings of the Torah and does not try to influence him to follow these teachings. Since he holds sway over his son, were he to admonish him, he would listen, and by not admonishing him, it is as if he caused him to sin.

Included in this sin also, are those who have the opportunity to reprimand others, whether an individual or a group, yet fail to do so. Rather than admonishing them, they allow them to continue their misdeeds.

4) One who says, "I will sin and then repent." Included in this category is one who says, "I will sin, and Yom Kippur will atone (my sins)."

**[4:2]** Among these 24 wrong deeds are five that close the door to repentance, (make repentance difficult). They are;

1) One who disassociates himself from the community. When the community repents he will not be with them, nor share in their merit.

2) One who contradicts the words of the Sages. As a result of the quarrel he provokes, he distances himself from them and does not learn how to repent.

3) One who shows contempt for the *mitzvos*. Considering them pointless, he does not want to perform them. If he does not perform *mitzvos* due to his contempt for them, how can he be expected to merit to repent.

4) One who degrades his teachers. Thus they will reject him by turning him away, as (Elisha did to) Geichazi, (Kings II, chapter 5). When he is cast away, he will not find a guide to show him the path of the Torah.

5) If one dislikes reprimands, his road to repentance is blocked, for reproof leads to repentance. When a person is told about his sins and feels ashamed of them, he will repent. as it is written, "Remember and never forget how you provoked God your Lord in the desert. From the day you left Egypt until you came here, you have been rebelling against God." (Deuteronomy 9:7). "But until this day, God did not give you a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear?" (Deuteronomy 2:3). "Is this the way you repay God, you ungrateful, unwise nation." (Deuteronomy 32:6). So too, Yeshayahu rebuked the Jewish people saying "An ox knows its

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40. In Tractate Sanhedrin (page 107) they tell about a meeting in Damascus, between the prophet Elisha and a former prophet Gaichazai. The reason that Elisha met with him was for the purpose to persuade Gaichazai to repent. Gaichazai's reply to Elisha was that he had learnt from Elisha his mentor that one who sins and causes others to sin with him cannot repent, therefore, since Gaichazai sinned in this manner he cannot repent. Maimonides in this paragraph states that one who sins in this manner has the ability to repent. We now need to understand how Elisha was trying to persuade Gaichazai to repent. Elisha told him to repent in general and not only to repent the sins that he caused others to sin with him. If he would have began his penitence with other sins and bad character traits then afterwards he would have been able to repent the sins that he caused others to sin with him.

We find another scenario where Menashe King of Judea sinned and caused others to sin with him, yet he repented as they were taking him to be executed, and God saved him because of his penitence.

owner, an ass its master's crib, Israel does not know. . ." (Yeshayahu 1:3). "Because I know how stubborn you are. (Yeshayahu 48:4). God also commanded us to admonish the transgressors, as it is written, "Cry with a full throat, without restraint." (Yeshayahu 58:1). Likewise, all the prophets chastised Israel to repent. Therefore, every congregation in Israel should appoint a great Rabbi of advanced age, known to be a God fearing man from his youth, and well liked, to admonish the congregation inspiring them to repent. A person who hates criticism will not listen to one who admonishes him. As a result, he continues his sinful ways, which he regards as good.

**[4:3]** Among these twenty four wrong deeds there are five transgressions for which one cannot fully repent. These are sins between people where he cannot find the person whom he wronged in order to pay him what he owes him, or to ask him forgiveness. They are;

1) One who curses the public without cursing a specific individual from whom he can ask forgiveness<sup>41</sup>.

2) One who buys stolen goods, from a thief who does not know the victims nor their addresses, (or he refuses to give the buyer this information). Furthermore, he sins by lending a hand to the thief, encouraging him to continue stealing.

3) One who finds a lost object and does not announce it right away as he is obligated to do by law, in order to return it to the owners. Later, when he wants to repent (and he announces it, and no one shows up because the owner either died or moved from the city), he will not know to whom to return the article.

4) One who eats the meat of an ox belonging to the poor, orphans, or widows. These unfortunate individuals are not well known or recognized by the people. They wander from city to city, and thus no one knows them or can identify them as the owners of the ox, in order to repay them.

5) A judge who accepts a bribe to render a judgment. He does not know the consequences of his act (if the bribe actually influenced him to make a wrong decision and if so he is obligated to pay the party that was wronged)<sup>42</sup>. Besides, by taking a bribe (he sins even if he judges correctly, and) he lends a hand to the person who bribed him, helping him sin.

**[4:4]** Among these twenty four wrong deeds, there are five transgressions of which a person is not likely to repent because most people, out of ignorance of the law, do not regard these deeds as sins.

1) One who eats from a meal that the host cannot afford, (and did not pay the host for the meal one way or another). This is considered a type of theft. The person who ate from this meal does not realize that he sinned, for he will rationalize and say to himself, "I ate only with the host's permission (and did not want to embarrass him by refusing)."

2) One who makes use of a security taken for a loan from a poor man. The security taken from a poor man is usually an ax or plow. He will rationalize and say to himself, they do not lose their value if they are used, and I did not steal anything from him.

3) One who looks at forbidden women. He says to himself, "Did I come in contact or have relations with her?" He does not realize that gazing at forbidden women is a great sin, for it leads to sexual immorality, as it is written, "Do not stray after your heart and your eyes." (Numbers 15:39).

4) One who gloats over his neighbor's shame. He thinks he has done nothing wrong, because his

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41. *If he cursed a specific community, he may ask that community forgiveness since he knows who they are.*

42. *He could however repent from this questionable miscarriage of justice, by paying the party he judged wrong, using an excuse that he later realized that he erred in his judgment. This is providing that he knows the party or has court records that will enable him to locate the party.*

neighbor is not present, thus, his neighbor was not humiliated. He merely compared his good deeds and wisdom with his neighbor's deeds and wisdom, making himself look respectable and his neighbor vulgar.

5) One who suspects an innocent person of doing wrong. He will think to himself that, "I have not sinned," rationalizing, "What harm have I done to him? I merely raised a doubt as to whether or not he sinned." He does not realize that it is a sin, to suspect an innocent person of being a transgressor<sup>43</sup>.

**[4:5]** Among these twenty four wrong deeds, there are five characteristics that the transgressor becomes addicted to, and are difficult to give up. Therefore, a person must be wary of them. They are; 1) Telling untruthful bad stories about someone; 2) Slandering someone by telling the truth about him; 3) Allowing oneself to become angry quickly; 4) Thinking about doing evil; 5) Becoming friendly with a wicked person. He learns from his deeds and they become rooted in his personality. King Solomon thought of such a person when he said, "He who keeps company with fools comes to grief." (Proverbs 13:20). In Hilchos Deos we explained the character traits that should be adopted. This is even more so required of one who needs to repent.

**[4:6]** All of the above, and similar transgressions, although they are roadblocks to repentance, they do not prevent it altogether. If one of these sinners repent, even if it be only partial repentance, he is considered a repentant person and has a share in the World to Come, even if he must be punished for not fully repenting.

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43. *He is however not required to trust him when dealing with monetary matters, and may therefore suspect his integrity.*



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### ***FREEDOM OF WILL***

**[5:1]** Freedom of choice to follow the laws of God or not to follow them, is granted to all men. If a person wants to follow the path of virtue, becoming a *tzaddik* (righteous person), that is his choice. Similarly, he can choose to follow the road of evil, becoming a *rosha* (wicked person). After Adam sinned, the Bible says, "Man has now become like one of us in knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:22). Meaning, mankind has become unique in the world. Only man, with his knowledge and thought, can distinguish good from evil and choose between the two. Adam and Eve were sentenced to die for their sin as they were forewarned. Therefore, Adam had to be expelled and banished from the Garden of Eden, because he now had free choice to put forth his hand and also take from the Tree of Life and live forever." (Genesis 3:27).

**[5:2]** Do not even contemplate the notion held by gentile fools, and ignorant Jews, that God decides at birth whether a person will be righteous or wicked. This is not true. Each person has the potential to become a righteous person going in the ways of the prophet Moses our teacher, or to be an evildoer like Yerovam (the evil king, who sinned and made others sin). He may acquire wisdom or foolishness, be compassionate or ruthless, miserly or generous, or have any other character trait. There is no higher power that compels, persuades or decrees which path one must choose. He is on his own accord, he freely chooses the road he wants to follow. Jerimiyah the prophet explained, "It is not at the word of the Most High, that evil or good come forth." (Lamentations 3:38). Meaning that the Creator does not decree that man be evil or righteous; the sinner's punishment is caused by himself. Therefore, a sinner should cry, grieving for his sins and for the harm he has done to his soul. Jerimiyah the prophet hints to this in the following verse, "What shall a living man bemoan? Each one his own sins!" (Lamentations 3:39). Jerimiyah explains: Since we have free choice, it was our decision to commit these wrongs. Therefore we should repent, abstaining from wickedness, since this also is in our control. He continues, "Let us search and examine our ways, and turn back to God." (Lamentations 3:40).

**[5:3]** The principle of freedom of choice is a basic concept and a pillar on which the entire Torah and *mitzvos* rest, as it is written, "See, I have set before you today to choose between life and good, and death and evil." (Deuteronomy 30:15). Also, "See, I am placing before you today a blessing and a curse." (Deuteronomy 11:26), implying that the choice is up to the person. A person can do good or evil. Therefore, when the Jews accepted the Torah, God pleaded with them to remain righteous, saying, "If only their hearts would always remain like this." (Deuteronomy 5:26). This implies that God does not force a person to do either good or bad. It is his own decision.

### ***DIVINE KNOWLEDGE AND FREE WILL***

**[5:4]** Were God to decree that a person be righteous or wicked, or were he born with an innate quality drawing him in a given direction, toward a certain ideal, mind set, or course of action, as foolish astrologers claim, how could He command us to do this and not to do that, to improve our behavior, and not to continue our evil ways? How could He command us to mend our ways and do not follow your evil path, when according to the astrologers misguided view, a person's character is fixed at birth, and his inborn nature relentlessly draws him to a certain goal from which there is no escape. If this were true, of what use would be the entire Torah? How would it be fair to punish the wicked or reward the righteous? Shall our Creator the one who Judges the world, not act justly?" (Genesis 18:25).

Do not ask: How can a person choose between good and evil, if nothing happens in this world without

God's permission. For it is written, "Whatever God desires He does, in heaven and earth." (Tehillim 135:6)? In fact, everything does happen by His will, nevertheless, the will of our Creator is to give the human the choice between good and evil. Just as God wants fire and wind to rise upward, water and earth to gravitate downward, the zodiac to move in a circular orbit, and the other creatures to be guided by the God given laws of nature, so too, He desired man to have free choice with the option to do as he wishes. Man, on his own initiative, and God-given intellect, was given the ability to do anything within his capacity. Therefore, man is judged according to his deeds. If he does good, he is rewarded. If he does bad, he is punished. And so it is written, "This has been done to you by your actions." (Malachi 1:9), and "They have chosen their path." (Yesbayahu 66:3). King Solomon had this in mind when he said, "Young man, enjoy yourself when you are young ... but know well that God will call you to account for all such things." (Ecclesiastes 11:9). In other words, know that you have the capacity to do anything you wish, but remember, you will have to answer for all your deeds in the future.

**[5:5]** You might ask: Since God knows the future, therefore, He knows if a person will be righteous or wicked? If He knows that a person will be righteous, is it then impossible for him to be wicked? If God knows that a person will be righteous, it is still possible for him to exercise his free to do evil<sup>44</sup>. This answer is "longer than the earth and broader than the sea." (Job 11:9). It involves a number of crucial principles of faith. However, you must understand the following statements. We have explained previously, in the second chapter of *Hilchos Yesodei Hatorab*, that God does not know with a knowledge that is outside and apart from Him, as does man whose knowledge is separate from himself. Rather, God and His knowledge are one. We, with our limited intellect cannot fully grasp this concept. Just as it is beyond human comprehension to understand even only a limited understanding of the Creator, as it is written, "A man cannot see Me and remain alive." (Exodus 33:20), so too, God's knowledge is even further beyond human comprehension. And so it is written, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways." (Yesbayah 55:8). Therefore, we do not understand God's perfect knowledge of the creation<sup>45</sup>. However, we do know without any doubt that man's actions are in his own hands, and God does not induce him to do good or evil. This fact, is not only a matter of faith, we understand this through philosophical proofs. Therefore, the prophets taught that a person is judged according to his deeds. This is a fundamental principle on which all the words of the prophets are predicated.

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44. *Knowing the future is not based on a mathematical calculation. The most advanced calculation would not be able to accurately predict the future. God's knowledge is infinite with no limits of time or measure.*

45. *We were given the ability to somewhat understand this concept. God is limitless, no physical or spiritual boundaries, neither in dimension nor in time. Only God exists, and we exist only in the mind of God. Therefore, God knows the future because there is no past or future, everything is present.*

*This is called perfect faith in God. God stated that He is good and does good for mankind. We must except this in perfect faith, whether we understand or do not understand what we see in real life. Many things that we do not seem to understand are because God is testing the person's faith in His justice. We hear people complain that God makes life difficult for us. Why should we not have an easy life in this world and also merit the world to come. The Sages tell us that one should be accustomed to say "whatever our Creator does is for our good."*

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### ***DIVINE RETRIBUTION FOR UNFORGIVABLE SINS***

**[6:1]** There are some verses in the Torah (five books of Moses) and Prophets that seem to contradict this fundamental principle, that the human being has free choice to do good or evil. Because of these verses, people think that God decrees whether a person does good or evil. I will explain a fundamental principle of faith to help you understand the true meaning of these verses. The rules that govern divine retribution dictate that an individual or the people of a country who sin consciously and willfully, must be punished. God is the judge. There are certain sins for which the transgressor is punished in this world. Either he is physically punished, or punishment is meted out to him through financial loss. Sometimes he is punished with his young children who are not yet *bar/bat mitzvos*, that they suffer with him, because young children are considered his property. This is expressed in the verse, "Every man shall die for his own sins." (Deuteronomy 24:16). This verse implies that only after one has become "a man," (*bar/bat mitzvah*) will he not die for his father's sins. (Kesubos 8b).

There are other sins for which punishment is meted out in the World to Come, and he is not punished for this sin while he lives<sup>46</sup>. There are other sins for which one is punished both in this world and in the World to Come.

**[6:2]** The aforementioned punishments are meted out if the transgressor does not repent, however, if he repents, his repentance acts as a protective shield against punishment. Just as a person has the freedom to sin consciously and willfully, so can he repent consciously and willfully.

### ***BARRIERS TO REPENTANCE***

**[6:3]** A person may commit a grave sin or many sins, that deserve unusual punishment, and God does not permit him to repent in order that he be (made an example of) and punished for these specific sins. And so, speaking through Yeshayahu, God says, "Dull that people's mind, stop their ears, and seal their eyes, lest seeing with their eyes and bearing with their ears, they will grasp with their minds, and repent and be healed." (Yeshayahu 6:10). Likewise it is written, "But they mocked the messengers of God and disdained His words and taunted His prophets, until the wrath of God against His people grew beyond remedy." (Chronicles II, 36:16).<sup>47</sup> The text implies that they willingly sinned to such an extent that they were barred from the "remedy" of repentance. That is why it is written, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart," (Exodus 14:4). Since Pharaoh sinned on his own, causing hardship to the Jews who lived in his land, as it is written, "Let us deal wisely with them." (Exodus 1:10), he deserved to be punished by not being allowed to repent, and God hardened his heart.

Why did God send Moses to Pharaoh saying, "let my people go! Repent" if God had already told Moses that Pharaoh would not let my people go, as it is written, "I realize that you and your subjects still do not fear God." (Exodus 9:30)? The reason God sent Moses to Pharaoh is expressed in the passage, "The only reason I let you survive was to show you My strength, so that My name will be discussed all over the world." (Exodus 9:16). God wanted to let mankind know that when He prevents a sinner from repenting, he will indeed die for the wickedness that he had committed willfully.

Likewise with Sichon, because of previous sins he was prevented from repenting, as it is written, "God

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46. *This is referring to sins that are punished by not seeing the World to Come. When he is so punished, he is paid in this world for the good that he has done, and not punished for this sin. However, he may be punished in this world for other misdeeds.*

47. *The verse describes the chain of events that led to the destruction of the first Holy Temple (Beis Hamikdash).*

had hardened his spirit and made his heart firm . . ." (Deuteronomy 2:30).

Similarly, the Canaanites, were prevented from repenting because of their loathsome way of life, thus they waged war against the Israelites, as it is written, "For it was God's doing to stiffen their hearts to do battle with Israel in order that they be destroyed." (Joshua 11:20).

In the same way, the Jews in the days of Elijah committed many wrongs. Those who committed many sins were prevented from repenting, as it is written, "You have turned their hearts backward." (Kings I, 18:37).

To summarize, God did not decree that Pharaoh harm the Jews, nor that Sichon sin in his land, nor that the Canaanites perform despicable acts, nor that the Jews worship idols. It was their own idea to commit sins and as punishment they were precluded from repenting<sup>48</sup>.

**[6:4]** The righteous people and the prophets had this in mind when they prayed to God to guide them on the path of truth so that they may repent and not rest in falsehoods. King David said, "Teach me Your way, O God, that I may walk in Your truth." (Psalms 86:11), meaning, do not let my sins prevent me from reaching the path of truth which will lead me to appreciate Your ways and the unity (perfection) of Your name. The same idea is expressed in, "Sustain me with a generous spirit." (Psalms 51:14), meaning, let my spirit be willing to do Your will, and do not let my sins close the gates of repentance for me. Rather, let me choose to repent, following the path of truth. All similar verses should be interpreted along these lines.

**[6:5]** What did King David mean when he said, "therefore He directs sinners on the way. He guides the lowly in the right path, and teaches the lowly His way." (Psalms 25:9)? (By guiding people on the right path, it would seem that God makes it impossible for them to choose evil). King David meant that God sends prophets letting the people know the path of God and inspiring them to repent. King David implies that God gave people the capacity to learn and understand.

A universal characteristic of all mankind is, that the more one follows the paths of wisdom and righteousness, the more good one desires and pursues. The Sages explain, "If one comes to cleanse himself, he is helped," (Shabbos 104a). Meaning, he receives help from heaven.

The verse, "And God said to Abraham, you shall surely know that your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land where they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years," (Genesis 15:1), implies that God decreed on the Egyptians to treat the Jews harshly. It also says, "This nation shall rise up and stray after the alien gods of the land." (Deuteronomy 31:16). This seems to suggest that God decreed Jews would worship idols. If so, why did He punish them? Answer, God did not decree that a particular individual worship idols. God was speaking generally; there will be Jews who worship idols. Each person who worshiped idols had the option not to do so. It is as though God told Moses; Among the Jewish nation there will be righteous and wicked people. However, a wicked man can not say, "I am destined to be an evildoer, for God told Moses there will be evildoers among the Jewish people." Similarly it is written, "The poor will never cease to exist in the land." (Deuteronomy 15:11); (that does not mean a given individual will be poor. It means some people, not everyone, will be poor). The same can be said of the Egyptians. Any Egyptian who abused a Jew had the option to treat him kindly. God did not order any particular Egyptian to harm the Jews; He merely told Abraham that in

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48. *The question is, how appropriate is the word "repenting" in this situation? Pharaoh was prevented from giving in to coercion and had no intention of repenting. When he did let them go, it was out of fear for his own life and not because he regretted his actions. Furthermore, how can he be punished for actions that he was forced to do? He can be punished for actions that he had a choice not to do, and further punished by not letting him repent those deeds so that he will be punished and not forgiven. The answer is, that Pharaoh had a choice by not reacting negatively to Moses' demand in the name of God to let the Jews go. Instead, after Moses made this demand, he increased the hardship on the Jews. For these sins, he was not allowed to repent.*

time to come, his descendants would be enslaved in a foreign country. I already mentioned earlier that the human mind is incapable of fathoming how God knows the future.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### ***THE GREATNESS OF REPENTANCE***

[7:1] Since man has freedom of choice, as explained above, a person must repent verbally, confessing his transgressions and ridding himself of his sins, so that he dies as a righteous, repentant Jew, worthy of life in the World to Come.

[7:2] A person does not know how long he is destined to be in this world. Therefore he should repent immediately, and not say to himself, "when I am old, I will repent." King Solomon wisely said, "Let your clothes always be white." (Ecclesiastes 9:8).<sup>49</sup>

[7:3] Do not think that repentance applies only to sins involving action, such as immorality, robbery, and theft. Just as one must repent these sins, so too must one search his soul for bad character traits, and, repent for becoming angry without proper justification, for being envious of his fellow man, for hating his fellow man, for mocking his fellow man, for running after money or honor, for overindulging in food, etc. From all these sins he must repent. It is more difficult to repent of bad character traits than of sins involving action, for it is extremely difficult for a person addicted to these (bad traits) to break away from them. Concerning this it is written, "The wicked will forsake their ways and the corrupt man his thoughts." (Yeshayahu 55:7).

[7:4] A truly repentant person should not think that his previous transgressions will keep him from attaining righteousness. This is not true. After repenting, his sins are erased from the book and he becomes a righteous person who did not sin<sup>50</sup>. Furthermore, he has done a great *mitzvah* by repenting and by abstaining from sinning again, although by nature he is attracted to these pleasures because he has tasted them. The Sages said, "The level of a repentant person is higher than the level of a truly righteous person," (relative to the *mitzvah* of repentance, and to the mitvos he transgressed and repented.) This is because the repentant person works harder to subdue his evil inclination not to do the *mitzvah*, since he has tasted the pleasures of sinning<sup>51</sup>.

[7:5] All our prophets urged us to repent, and in fact, the Jewish people will be redeemed only when they do repentance. The Torah predicts, that in the end of our exile, the Jewish people will repent, and immediately be redeemed. For it is written, "There will come a time when all these things will happen to you ... and you will return to the Lord your God ... God will then bring you back from captivity." (Deuteronomy 30:1-3).

[7:6] The greatness of Repentance is that it brings a person closer to God, as it is written, "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God." (Hoshea 14:2); "You did not turn back to Me, declares the Lord." (Amos 4:8); "If you repent, O Israel, you will return to Me." (Jeremiah 4:1). Which means; If you repent, you will be close to Me. Furthermore, repentance has the power to bring those who are far removed from God close to God. Only

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49. *Meaning, repent (every day) and you will be free of sin.*

50. *Although he is lacking the mitzvos he did not do, due to his sins, nevertheless, he is considered righteous in the same way that one who was ill and could not perform mitzvos because of his illness, is considered righteous.*

51. *In general, the truly righteous person is on a higher spiritual level than a former sinner who repented. If they were both righteous, but one did one sin and repented, they would both be considered on the same spiritual level.*

yesterday this sinner was hated by God, loathed, disdained, and considered an abomination, and today he is beloved, cherished, held close and befriended by God. With the same strong phrases that God uses to distance Himself from sinners, whether individuals or masses, He uses oppositely strong phrases to welcome those who repent. For it is written, "Instead of being told, you are not My people, they shall be called Children-of-the-Living-God." (Hoshea 2:1). And when King Yechonyah was still wicked, it is written about him, "Inscribe this man to become childless, a man who will not succeed in his life." (Jeremiah 22:30); "Even if you, Choniah (i.e., Yechonyah) son of Yehoyakim, king of Judea, would be a signet ring (A signet ring never leaves the hand of its wearer (Redak), on My right hand, I would pull you off." (Jeremiah 22:24). But after he repented when in exile, it is written about his son Zerubavel, "On that day, so says God, Master of Legions, I will take you, Zerubavel son of Shealtiel, My servant the word of God-and I will make you like My signet ring." (Chaggai 2:23).

[7:7] What a wonderful attribute repentance is! Only yesterday this transgressor was separate from the God of Israel, as it is written, "Your sins have been a barrier between you and your God." (Yeshayahu 59:2). He cried out and no one answered, as it is written, "Though you pray at length, I will not listen." (Yeshayahu 1: 15). He fulfilled *mitzvos*, only to have them trodden before him, as it is written, "Who asked of you to come and trample My courts." (Yeshayahu 1:12); "If only you would lock My doors, and not kindle fire on My altar to no purpose. I take no pleasure in you, and I will accept no offering from you!" (Malachi 1:10). Yet today the former transgressor is attached to God, as it is written, "You who are attached to God." (Deuteronomy 4:4). He cries out (to God) and is answered at once, as it is written, "Before they call I will answer." (Yeshayahu 65:24). He fulfills *mitzvos* and they are accepted with pleasure and joy, as it is written, "Your action was long ago approved by God." (Ecclesiastes 9:7). Furthermore, He desires his *mitzvos*, as it is written, "Then the offerings of Yehudah and Jerusalem shall be pleasing to God, as in by gone days and in former years." (Malachi 3:34).

[7:8] The nature of a repentant person is to be meek and humble. If fools embarrass him because of his previous deeds, telling him, "Yesterday, you committed such-and-such sins; yesterday you said such-and-such (vulgar) expressions," he should pay no attention to them<sup>52</sup>. On the contrary, when he hears these taunts, he should be

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## 52. *Character Traits*

*The Bible discusses major character traits, some are forbidden, some are frowned upon, others are required, and others are recommended. Good character traits are the base needed in order to perform the mitzvos properly.*

*The character trait of conceit and haughtiness is defined as one who thinks that he is great but not necessarily greater than others. He feels great because of his superior physical abilities, such as intelligence, strength, beauty, and the like, or because of his wealth, power, or influence, and the like. He may feel that he is not greater than others because others have abilities that he does not have. Yet he may be so conceited as to consider himself superior than others regardless, or because he worked hard for success and others were born with these abilities or influence. In sports competition, each participant strives to show his superiority and win. This does not mean that everyone who wins a game feels conceit because he may have won this game and someone else will win the next game. The competition is used as a drive for him to do his best. Using this reasoning, one may properly strive to forge ahead in his career and demand a higher position according to his capabilities, because he belongs there and not because he is conceited. A person must know how he rates in society and not live in his imagination. A conceited person takes his superiority feeling to heart and builds his ego on it. Conceit is recognizable in a person's character and is generally frowned upon.*

*Conceit and haughtiness are Biblically unacceptable because they are not a rational or a logical way to think according to Jewish theology. A machine is considered superior if its performance is superior because it was built for that purpose. A person was created in this world for one purpose, and that is to serve GOD His Creator by overcoming his animalistic traits with the help of his spiritual soul and abstaining from what is forbidden, and doing what he is required to do. There is reward for proper behavior in the*

World to Come after death, and some reward in this world. There is punishment for improper behavior both in this world and after death. Jews must obey their code of laws and non-Jews must obey their seven moral rules of mankind (Noahide Laws). Consequently, the human is superior because of his close relation to GOD, and he must not feel inferior. The human is great if he completes his purpose in life and serves GOD properly. He is unfavorable to GOD if he does not serve Him properly. Yet how can anyone feel great and confident that he is serving his Creator properly when he is commanded to serve Him with all his heart, with his life, and with all his possessions. Therefore, no one may feel superior or great, and there is no logical basis for conceit. Furthermore, we must understand why all men were not created physically equal, namely that it was for the purpose of creating a society of leaders, judges, scholars, businessmen, workers, military officers, soldiers, etc. Each one is expected to use his abilities accordingly to serve his Creator. One who shows off his attributes such as wealth, beauty, strength, knowledge, and the like, is conceited unless he has a good reason to do so, such as to earn money, this does not mean that a woman is permitted to show off her beauty. Therefore, if one is engrossed in worldly pleasures, these pleasures awaken his animalistic character traits, and this leads him to conceit.

After cleansing oneself from the character trait of conceit and haughtiness one can achieve the character trait of modesty. Modesty in thought is when one feels that others who are GOD-fearing are equal or greater than he because they probably serve GOD better than he does. Modesty in action is when one dresses modestly, lives modestly, and talks with respect to his friends, family members, students, workers, and people he meets. Philanthropists should give charity without fanfare unless they feel that fanfare is needed in order to influence others to be charitable. Well known public figures may live modestly in their private lives.

A modest person is satisfied with his material lot because he accepts the decree from Heaven. He may strive to improve his lot, but he is satisfied with his present situation. He also believes that whatever befalls him is for the best of his interests regardless whether he understands why it happened to him. On hearing bad tidings one must say the blessing "Blessed be the true judge." Therefore, if one is harmed or embarrassed by a neighbor, he should not become angry because no man can harm him or help him unless he is permitted to do so from Heaven. His initial reaction should be self examination, perhaps he sinned and is being punished. Then he should try to talk to the person to repent on his own and ask forgiveness, and make amends for the damages he did. If this is not an option, then he should take him to court because he had the choice of not harming him, and he chose the path of the sinners. If he was befriended by his neighbor, he should repay his kindness whenever he has the opportunity to do so. Although he was given permission from Heaven to help him, nevertheless, the neighbor had the choice of not to help him and he chose the path of the righteous.

It is important for a modest person to face reality. A person may remain modest, yet, when necessary, reprimand someone who is not acting properly even if he must raise his voice or punish the student or worker.

The character trait of arrogance is the opposite of bashfulness, and does not fit into the definition of a modest person. Arrogance is a product of either conscious or subconscious haughtiness. It is as if to say arrogantly to someone, "who are you?" or "who do you think you are? I am better than you." This character trait is not socially acceptable. However, when confronting arrogant sinners who must be stopped, and the way to do this is by arrogantly opposing them, this type of arrogance against sinners emanates from his love for the Torah and not from haughtiness.

The character trait of love is found in the Creation. We are commanded in the Bible, Deuteronomy (6:4-9), "You shall love the Lord your GOD with all your heart, and with your life, and with all your possessions." Your Creator, who has given you life, demands of you to love Him above all others, and obey His commandments above those of anyone else when they conflict, to the extent of giving your life not to worship idols, not to kill, not to commit incest. We are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to do unto others as one would do unto himself. This is referring to helping one's neighbor spiritually and physically. If one sees a family member or student or neighbor stray from the path of the Torah and does not try to correct his path, that one is not fulfilling his obligation to love his neighbor. Love of worldly pleasures awakens his animalistic character traits and leads him to conceit, which leads him away from the path of the Torah.

The character trait of hate does not serve civilized society well. The Bible forbids one to hate his brother even if one's hate is not discernible in his relationship with the person whom he hates, and even if one's hate is not as severe as to rejoice when the person whom he hates is put to shame, or lost his position, or had financial losses. Civilized societies function well with teamwork and not with



racism, anti-semitism, or politically based hate, or the like. This type of unjustified hate causes controversy, slander, breakup of society, physical fighting, damaging property, maiming, and killing. The victims of these hates are justified in hating their oppressors. The proper procedure for a victim, is first to try to reason with the one who damaged him that he should repent, ask forgiveness, and pay for his loss. This is not always an option, but taking him to court may be an option. However, it is commendable to despise evil such as evil doers, idol worship, slander, lies, and the like.

The character trait of being merciful is a positive attribute when properly guided, and it is an attribute of Jews. As a general rule, it is forbidden to cause unnecessary pain to humans or creatures who experience pain. If one sees a human or creature in pain, he should try to help alleviate the pain. If he must protect himself, he should do so in the course of action without vengeance and torture. If he needs a creature for its food or skin, he should use a trap that is not that painful, and a merciful way to end its life. For food, he must ritually slaughter the animal or bird. If one has mercy on an enemy who is evil and desires to kill him, and he refuses the opportunity to kill the enemy, he will eventually fall into the hands of his enemy. An enemy is to be disposed of in the course of action without specifically torturing him out of hate. If one witnesses a court ordered punishment or execution, he may not feel bad for him because his punishment is justified.

The character trait of being joyful when performing mitzvot and when praying is a product of worshiping out of love. This joy is in one's heart and mind. The joy associated with holidays and joyous occasions such as weddings and circumcisions, is not only in one's heart and mind, but also in physical adornments such as pretty table settings, good clothing, tasty foods, fish, meat, wine, and the like. If one enjoys worldly pleasures by overeating, overdrinking, light-headedness, and the like, this tortures his soul, and it will bring him to sin. The proper way for a person to enjoy life is for him to be satisfied with his lot in this world and accepts his lot as being the will of his Creator. He does not fear or worry because he has faith in the Almighty that He will do the best for him. One may work to improve one's lot, but should be presently satisfied with his lot. There is no reason for one to be satisfied with his spiritual level, however, because one's level of spirituality is not decreed by Heaven; it is a product of his efforts to choose to obey the Torah, and his level is constantly subject to improvement.

The character trait of regretting something that one did is referring to one who realized that he erred, regrets his error, and corrects the error either in private or in public. A conceited person, depending on how conceited he is, may not see his error because, he believes that it is beyond him to err, or may realize his error but not admit that he erred, or he may admit his error because he is afraid that if the error is discovered by others they will severely ridicule him.

Regretting one's sin is the first component of repentance. If he truly regrets his sin, then he would never want to repeat it in the future, this is the second component of repentance. Oppositely, if he regrets having done a mitzvah, and decides never to repeat the mitzvah he loses the merit of the mitzvah.

The character trait of anger is not socially accepted. When a person goes into a rage he loses his self control and may even murder. One must not reprimand a person during his anger unless he is threatening someone or someone's property. One should not reprimand a person out of anger. Before chastising the sinner, he should speak to him and try to persuade him to repent. If this does not work then he may try to talk harshly to him, and if he sinned in public it may be necessary to reprimand him in public, all this without anger. Conceit brings one to anger when he is not honored the way he expects to be honored, or someone does not obey his order. To avoid displaying one's internal anger, one should learn to think before speaking, and to speak quietly, and sometimes not to speak at all. If one accepts that all that befalls him is decreed from Heaven and in his best interests, why would something anger him unless he is angered at the evil that he sees?

The character trait of a strong will is a catalyst with other character traits such as the power of concentration to study and pray without side distractions. One need not be born with a strong will; one may acquire it by slowly building up his will the same as a weight lifter builds up his strength. A strong will is needed to forge ahead spiritually. It is also commendable for him to use his will to gain more expertise in his field in order to better help his clients, or to expand his business to employ more workers and increase his philanthropy. We have seen strong willed persons who led movements that rebelled against the teachings of the Torah and destroyed their lives with the lives of many others. Therefore, a strong will must be used properly; otherwise it may cause a catastrophe.

The character trait of jealousy is defined as one being jealous of his neighbor because he has something good and he does

not want him to have it even if he does not need it. Therefore, even if he does not plan to take it for himself, but only to destroy the item so that the neighbor should not have it, he violated a Biblical prohibition. One who is satisfied with his lot is not jealous of others. If he likes what his neighbor has, then he is satisfied that his neighbor is enjoying himself with it, and he is not jealous of him. If he likes the item the neighbor has, he will put it on his shopping list for a future date. The jealousy that is forbidden in the Ten Commandments is if he took the item from his neighbor against his will, or he destroyed it. There is another prohibition against planning to take it from his neighbor even if he does not succeed. If he does not plan to take it away or destroy it but he only wishes that he loses it, he does not violate the commandment. There is a lower level of jealousy, although he does not plan on taking it from his neighbor, yet he will rejoice if he loses it. If he is envious of his neighbor position of honor, he will be happy if his neighbor will be embarrassed and demoted. This is not the same with spiritual levels, since these levels are attained through one's choice of good above evil and are not decreed by Heaven, one may not be satisfied with his level of spirituality and must constantly strive to achieve higher levels. Therefore, one may be jealous of his neighbor's spirituality. However, why should one be jealous of another's level of spirituality if not for the purpose of setting it as an example for one to achieve it himself?

The character trait of being careful to do a job well is a prerequisite to performing mitzvot properly. In the business world, one pays for the type of job he wants. A detailed, precise job costs more than a quick job. This option is generally not available with performing mitzvot, which have precise rules. If one misses a detail when doing the mitzvah, he did not perform the mitzvah. Some mitzvot may require a detail that is not optional, but, if not done, the mitzvah is nevertheless considered done.

The character trait of agility in the performance of mitzvot is a product of worshiping GOD joyously and out of love. As soon as the mitzvah becomes available, he will strive to complete it carefully with agility. If he is not careful, he will rush to complete it and may very well not complete it because he missed a detail.

The character trait of laziness is an impediment to getting ahead in life. Laziness in performing a mitzvah can be the cause of not performing the mitzvah, because, by the time he wants to do the mitzvah, the mitzvah may no longer be available, either because someone else did it, or the situation changed, or the time to perform the mitzvah passed.

The character trait of philanthropy is not found in the majority of people. People will give charity and help their neighbor but they do not dedicate themselves to these pursuits. A philanthropist dedicates himself to helping people with either money or time, and skillful leadership.

The character trait of stinginess is a character trait of many societies, and many people value their money more than their lives. The Bible commands us to "love the Lord your GOD with all your heart, and with your life, and with all your possessions," even if your possessions are dearer to you than your life. People who are miserly will find themselves helping others with their time but not with their money. On the other hand you find righteous people who are stingy with their daily expenses in order to give more charity. However, one should not go to an extreme and live in poverty in order to give charity, because charity begins at home.

Memory is a factor in one's intelligence. It becomes a character trait when one strives to memorize what is important to him. Many people simply leave matters to their inactive memory and do not make an effort to remember even important matters. Any student knows that the method of memorizing is basically reviewing the subject matter many times preferably with a friend, and preferably before going to sleep. When one studies Torah, one must do one's best not to forget it. It is forbidden to want to forget Torah. If one sins, he is required to remember his sin at least until after Yom Kippur because he must confess and repent his sins on Yom Kippur. It is better for one to study less subject matter, but subject matter that is most needed for one to know, and to memorize it, than to study many subjects and forget them. A good way to remember is to write the more important halachos in short, and note his sins, and review it from time to time.

Talking becomes a character trait when one trains his speech to obey specific character traits. Many positive and negative commandments are done or violated through speech. A person should talk less, think before he talks, talk deliberately, and softly. The mitzvah of studying Torah is done through speech that he can hear. One is commanded to constantly study Torah, when at home or at the synagogue, when traveling, before one retires for the evening, and when one arises in the morning. One should not engage in idle talk. When praying, one should pronounce the words clearly. The bad traits of talking are lying, cheating, slander, insulting people, cursing, and the like. For the purpose of making peace between people or to prevent conflicts, it is permitted to tell a white lie. It is

permitted to praise a bride before her groom and say that she is pretty and good-natured even if he feels that it is not completely true.

The character trait of being quiet and non-talkative is commendable and is a character trait found in a modest person. When in the presence of wise people, one may maximize learning from these wise men by listening and not talking, and asking questions to understand their wisdom. If someone insults him, he should not answer him. If he sees someone sinning, he must not keep quiet, but he is required to talk to him and persuade him to repent. Sometimes it is necessary to chastise the sinner. If one ignores the sinner and looks away, one becomes a partner to the sin because it appears that he is sanctioning the sinner. Otherwise why doesn't he protest? "Mind your own business" has been a problem with the Jewish nation from when they were redeemed from Egypt. "Mind your own business" is a very good trait in general because it enables family privacy, keeps one from slander, etc. However, when dealing with sinners, it's mind the sinner's business, and all Israel are responsible for each other, and "chastise shall you chastise your neighbor." Those who actually worshiped the Golden Calf were a very small minority as we can see by the numbers who were actually punished, yet GOD considered it a national sin because the vast majority should have prevented it even through bloodshed.

The character trait of being truthful is defined as wanting to know the truth, being truthful with himself and others. One who is conceited is not truthful with himself, because in truth he has no reason to be conceited. Therefore, even if he errs, his conceit may not allow him to admit the error, either because he doesn't want others to know that he erred, or that he doesn't realize that he erred because he is beyond making a mistake. Being truthful is prerequisite to properly practicing the Torah. If he is truthful he will know when he sins and then he will be able to repent the sin. His teachings and judgments will be accepted because people will see that they are correct.

The character trait of flattery is befriending and flattering a sinner because he feels that he needs the sinner's favors. This type of flattery is prohibited as long as the sinner understands that the flatterer is justifying his sins. For example, the sinner uses false weights, and the flatterer, seeing him do this says, "your a great person." Although he does not tell him that it is not wrong to use false weights, as long as the sinner feels that the flatterer is justifying his use of false weights, it is a violation of the prohibition of flattery. Flattery is forbidden even if he knows that the sinner does not care about his opinion, and will continue to sin whether he flatters him or chastises him. If one is working with unethical workers, he must be careful not to give the impression that he sanctions their sins.

The character trait to fear the Creator is not fear of the Creator's punishment, it is fear of the awe of the Almighty Who created the Universe and the human soul. He was forever and will be forever, and is limitless. If so, then he certainly respects and honors his Creator for the same reason, respect out of awe. He will also obey Him out of fear and love because he was created and born into this world to award him for choosing the path of the Torah. However, children who do not understand this concept of a Creator are taught to fear the punishment of GOD.

### ***Ascending Character Traits***

Conceit and Modesty have been explained before. A person can fully obey the Torah and yet be conceited. However, conceit restricts a person's ability to ascend to higher levels of spirituality and therefore we will consider conceit as the basic character trait to correct. Afterwards, one will have to acquire modesty and love for the Torah in order to ascend step by step to higher levels of spirituality. Through studying the Torah and its related subjects such as halacha, ethics, kabbalah, one is able to ascend to greater spirituality.

One must be careful to avoid sin and turn away from sin before one finds himself in a situation where he may fall to temptation. One must be careful to perform mitzvos with all their details.

One must be agile to avoid a sin and turn away from sin at the first opportunity and not at the second opportunity. One should be agile to perform a mitzvah and do it as soon as he has the opportunity and complete it without delay, being careful to do it with all its details.

One must strive for perfection and repent his past sins and bad character traits and strive not to sin again.

The next step is to benefit from this world for the purpose of doing mitzvos and not for pleasure alone. He should eat healthy food for the purpose of enabling his body to perform mitzvos. He should earn a livelihood for the purpose of fulfilling his family obligations and in order to give charity and support Torah institutions.

happy, knowing that it is a merit for him. When he is shamed for the deeds he committed, his merits grow and his (spiritual) level is raised.

It is an absolute prohibition (sin) to taunt a repentant person saying, "Remember your previous deeds," mentioning them in his presence in order to embarrass him, or reminding him of the surrounding circumstances, so that he recalls what he did. This is absolutely forbidden as verbal abuse is, which the Torah forbids, as it is written, "Do not wrong one another." (Leviticus 25:17).

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*A higher level is to remove all thoughts of sin and bad character traits from his mind and heart.*

*The next level is to perform mitzvos out of love, to the extent that wherever applicable he will go beyond the basic requirements without adding to or subtracting from the halachik details. For example, he gives more charity than he is obligated to give. He spends more money than he is required, to purchase a better set of the four species for the Succos holiday. He takes more time to complete his prayers because of his love for the mitzvah. If there is a Rabbinical dispute regarding the details of performing a mitzvah and the Shulchan Aruch decides who is correct, and the person studying the disputes is not convinced of this decision, although he knows that he must follow the decision of the Shulchan Aruch, yet if he sees a way that he can perform the mitzvah according to all opinions, he will do so. This level is for Rabbinical scholars, and even Rabbinical scholars must be careful not to lose more than one gains when going beyond the basic requirements to perform a mitzvah. For example, he decides to fast one day in order to teach himself abstinence from physical pleasures. If the need to abstain from these pleasures is not critical, and he is no immediate danger of violating any precepts, however, he cannot study Torah when fasting, he loses more than he gains by fasting.*

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### ***REWARD AND PUNISHMENT IN THE WORLD TO COME***

**[8:1]** The reward that is prepared for the righteous in the World to Come, is without death, and good without evil. The Torah alludes to this, saying, "You will have it good, and you will live long." (Deuteronomy 22:7). The Sages taught: "You will have it good," in the world that is entirely good, "and you will live long," in the world which is infinitely long, namely, the World to Come. The righteous are rewarded by their souls studying God's wisdom and unifying with the Holy light and intelligence of God, and sharing in this goodness. The wicked are punished and they do not merit this life<sup>53</sup>. Instead they are cut off and cease to exist. Whoever does not merit this life, after death he will be cut off from his source of Holy light due to his sins, and perish like a beast. This is what the term *kareis* in the Torah means, as it is written, "Cut off shall he be cut off that soul." (Exodus 15:31). The Tractate (Sanhedrin 90b) explains, he shall be "cut off" in this world, and "shall be cut off," in the World to Come. When the soul of a person who is punished by *kareis* (premature death) leaves this world, it does not merit life in the World to Come.

**[8:2]** There are no physical bodies<sup>54</sup> in the World to Come. Only the souls of the righteous, without a body, exist, similar to the ministering angels. Since there are no physical bodies, there is neither eating, drinking, nor any other bodily function of this world like sitting, standing, sleeping, death, sadness, laughter, etc. The early Sages said, "in the World to Come there is no eating, drinking or sexual relations, but the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads, deriving pleasure from the radiance of the God's light of knowledge." (Berachos 17a.) Since there is no body, there is no eating or drinking. The statement "the righteous sit," is metaphoric, meaning, the righteous exist without labor or exertion. In the same vein, the phrase, "their crowns on their heads," is also a metaphor, implying that they retain all the knowledge they acquired during their life on earth which enabled them to enter the World to Come. This knowledge is their crown, as King Solomon said (referring to wisdom), "The crown with which his mother crowned him." (Song of Songs (3:11). Proof that the crown is a symbol of knowledge is seen in the verse "Everlasting joy will be on their heads." (Yeshayahu 5:11). Joy is not a tangible object that can rest on someone's head. By the same token, when the Sages speak of a "crown," they mean

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53. *As was explained before, there are wicked people who will not see the World to Come, and others who will see it but will not merit it on their own, but only through the righteous in the World to Come.*

54. *Maimonides is criticized by others for claiming that the World to Come is for souls without bodies, because if so, how can there be a rising of the dead without a body. Commentaries answer that it is a semantic disagreement. According to Maimonides, a physical body that dresses a soul in the same manner that angels appear to those who have seen them with their eyes, such as Abraham and the three angels, cannot be referred to as a body. A body is understood to have physical needs such as a need to eat, drink, sleep, etc. This physical dress of the soul in the period of the Rising of the Dead, is completely subordinate to the soul and has none of the human desires as we know. Nachmonides (Ramban) calls this physical dress of the soul a body. He also notes in his work titled Shaar Hagemul, that the World to Come starts off with a body. It is to be deduced from these words that at a later stage the soul will lose this body, and that stage of the World to Come will continue without this body. He is referring to the stages in the creation of the Universe. At the beginning it is totally condensed as far as it can. Then it reverses itself and begins expansion and the start of the creation of the four stages of creation. With the creation of the fourth stage, it becomes possible to create bodies. The Rising of the Dead and the start of the World to Come will be while the fourth stage will still exist, and therefore, the soul will be given this physical dressing. The process of creation is expansion and contraction. Therefore, as the universe contracts, the fourth stage is the first to disintegrate, and with it the bodies of these souls.*

something intangible, namely, knowledge.

The phrase, "deriving pleasure from the radiance of God's light of knowledge," means they will grasp the truth of the Holy One, blessed be He, which they could not fathom while confined in the physical body.

**[8:3]** When we use the term "soul," in this context we do not mean the soul that needs the body. Rather, "the form of the soul," which is the knowledge of God it acquired according to its ability and its understanding of abstract ideas and other matters. This is the "form," we discussed in the fourth chapter of *Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah*, and it is the soul we are speaking about in this context. Since this life is not connected to death-for death happens only to a (physical) body, and there are no bodies in the World to Come, life in the World to Come is called "the Bond of Life." As it is written, "The soul of my master will be bound up in the bond of life." (Samuel I, 25:29). This is the greatest reward and the unsurpassed good. It is (the good) for which all the prophets yearned.

**[8:4]** Scripture uses many symbolic terms to describe the World to Come. "The mountain of God," (Psalms 24:3), "His holy place," (ibid.) "the holy path," (Yeshayahu 35:8), "The courtyards of God." (Psalms 65:5, 92:14), "the pleasantness of God." (Psalms 15:1), "the palace of God." (Psalms 5:8), "the house of God," (Psalms 27:4), and "the gate of God." (Psalms 118:20). The Sages metaphorically called this good that is set aside for the righteous "the banquet." Commonly, this ultimate good is referred to as "the World to Come."

**[8:5]** The worst punishment possible for the soul, is to be cut off, not meriting life in the World to Come. And so it is written, "His soul shall be utterly cut off, and his sin shall remain upon him." (Numbers 15:31). This refers to the destruction of the soul which was described by the prophets in figurative terms as, "the pit of destruction." (Psalms 55:24), "the fire pit." (Yeshayahu 30:33), and "the grave." (Proverbs 30:15). All the terms used to portray destruction and obliteration are applied to the cutting off of the soul, for it is the final destruction. After this, there is no renewal and the loss is irretrievable, never to be restored.

**[8:6]** Do not imagine that the good of the World to Come<sup>55</sup>, and the reward for doing the *mitzvos* and being an upright person is eating and drinking delicacies, having relations with beautiful women, wearing garments of linen and embroidery, dwelling in ivory palaces, using silver and gold dishes, etc., as imagined by the foolish, uneducated people, who are steeped in immorality. The Sages and wise men know that these physical pleasures are vain and empty pursuits, without any purpose. The only reason that in this world we think they are of benefit is because we have a body and physical form. These things are needed for the well being of the body. The soul longs for them only because the body needs them, to meet the person's physical needs keeping him healthy. When the body passes away, these desires vanish.

There is no way in this world to fathom the sheer good the soul will experience in the World to Come.

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55. There are punishments after death that are not so severe. These punishments are for a limited time in order to cleanse the soul so that it may enter the Garden of Eden and thereafter the World to Come. The *seforim* (holy books) on the subjects of *kabalah* (mysticism) discuss these punishments. This is not the place to discuss this matter at length, but I will briefly mention it. The place of punishment is called *Gehenom* (Hell). There are different sections of *Gehenom*, one more severe than the other, both in types of punishment and in severity of punishment. Then there is the punishment of "gilgulim," in which the soul must wander in this world for a period of time before he is allowed to enter *Gehenom*. People who do not have children in their lifetime, their souls must return to this world in a new-born body to grow up, marry, and produce children, in order to rectify what he was lacking in his previous lifetime.

In this world we only know and desire physical good. But the goodness of the World to Come cannot be compared to the good things of this world except in a figurative sense. There is no way to compare the good of the soul in the World to Come to the physical enjoyments of this world. That good is infinitely greater with nothing like it. King David had this in mind when he said, "How abundant is the good that You have in store for those who fear you!" (Psalms 31:20).

**[8:7]** King David deeply craved life in the World to Come, as can be seen from the passage, "Had I not the assurance that I would enjoy the goodness of God in the land of the living. . ." (Psalms 27:13). The Talmudic Sages have already told us that man is unable to grasp the full extent of the goodness in the World to Come. No one can know its greatness, beauty, and impact, except God alone. The wonderful things the prophets foretold for Israel do not refer to the reward in the World to Come. Rather, their prophecies involve only the physical delights that Israel will enjoy in the Messianic age when supremacy over the world will be given to Messiah (the anointed one,) King of Israel. Even the Messianic period cannot compare to the goodness of life in the World to Come. The prophets did not describe it, for fear their descriptions would not do it justice. Yeshayahu explained, saying, "No eye has ever seen, O God, except for You, what You will do for those who trust in You." (Yeshayahu 64:3). This means, the goodness of the World to Come which was never seen by a prophet, and was only, seen by God, and was created by God for those who trust in Him. The Sages said, the prophets prophesied only about the Messianic Age. "No eye has ever seen, O God, except for You," the goodness of the World to Come.

**[8:8]** The Sages, when using the expression "The World to Come," do not imply that it does not exist now, and will come into existence only when this physical world is destroyed. On the contrary, the World to Come already exists, as it is written, "How abundant is the good that You have in store for those who fear You... which You have made." (Psalms 31:20). It is called "the World to Come," because a person enters that stage of life only after his life in this world<sup>56</sup>, where he exists as a combination of body and soul, has come to an end. This physical life is his first stage, giving him the opportunity to earn a share in the World to Come by choosing to follow in God's ways.

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56. *After death, a righteous soul enters the Garden of Eden and waits there for the period of the Rising of the Dead, and thereafter, the World to Come. From the wording of Maamonides, it appears that he names this whole process the World to Come.*

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### ***REWARD AND PUNISHMENT IN THIS WORLD***

**[9:1]** We explained that the reward for fulfilling the *mitzvos* and observing the path of God laid out in the Bible and Talmud, is the World to Come, as it is written, "If you do this, you will have it good and will live long." (Deuteronomy 22:7). The punishment inflicted on the wicked who leave the path of the righteous is *kareis* (premature death), as it is written, "That person shall be utterly cut off spiritually and his sin shall remain upon him." (Numbers 15:31). In light of that, what is the meaning of statements found throughout the entire Torah implying that, if you keep the *mitzvos*, you will merit rewards in this world, and, if you do not keep the commandments, you will be punished in this world? Furthermore, these rewards and punishments, discussed in the Tanach, are worldly things, including abundance or famine, peace or war, supremacy over other nations, or persecution, living in Eretz Yisrael or living in exile, success in one's undertakings or ruin, and other points mentioned in the covenant of the Tochachah. (Leviticus, chapter 26 and Deuteronomy, chapter 28.).

In fact these statements are true. They have happened in the past, and they will happen in the future. When we fulfill the *mitzvos* of the Torah, we are entitled to the rewards of this world<sup>57</sup>. On the other hand, if we transgress the commandments, the evils outlined in the Torah come to pass<sup>58</sup>. But the rewards that the righteous receive in this world are not the final rewards for following in the way of God. Punishments in this world are not necessarily the final retribution imposed on someone who violates the *mitzvos*. Rather, God gave us the Torah which is the Tree of Life. Whoever fulfills what is written in it, and understands it, deserves life in the World to Come. The share a person merits in the World to Come depends on his knowledge of the laws of the Torah and his fulfillment of these laws. Furthermore, the Torah promises that if we fulfill the *mitzvos* with joy and love, engrossing ourselves in its wisdom all the time, God will remove the deterrents that prevent us from fulfilling it, such as sickness, war, famine, etc. God will also cause good to happen, that will foster our observance of the Torah. These include, abundance, peace, and a profusion of silver and gold, so that we will not be busy working for a livelihood, and we will have time to study the Torah and perform its *mitzvos*, thus meriting life in the World to Come.

After promising the rewards of this world, the Torah concludes, "It will be a merit for us to safeguard and keep all of these commandments." (Deuteronomy 6:24). The Torah also warns us that if we intentionally turn our back on the Torah, occupying ourselves in hollow pursuits, as it is written, "Yeshurun (i.e., Israel) became fat and rebelled." (Deuteronomy 32:15), the True Judge will no longer spoil them with the good things in life that fostered their rebellion. He will then bring upon us the evils that prevent us from acquiring a share in the World to Come, so that they either repent or perish. As it is written, "Because you did not serve God with happiness and a glad heart ... You will therefore serve your enemies, which God will send against you." (Deuteronomy 18:47,48).

Consequently, the blessings and curses found in the Bible, can be explained as follows. If you serve God, joyfully observing His way, He will bestow on you these blessings and remove from you these curses, so that you may study the Torah, engrossing yourself in it and in its fulfillment, in order to merit life in the World to Come. "Good will be granted you," in a world that is entirely good, "and you will live long," in a world that is ever lasting, the World to Come. Thus, you will merit two worlds, a good life in this world, which, in turn,

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57. *Entitlement to reward in this world does not mean it is obligatory, for we find righteous people who suffer in this world.*

58. *Punishment in this world is not obligatory because we find sinners who live a good life until their end. Reward in this world is not obligatory because we find righteous people who suffer in this world.*



will bring you to life in the World to Come<sup>59</sup>. If a person does not acquire wisdom or good deeds in this world, he may not merit the World to Come<sup>60</sup>. As it is written, "There is no action, no reasoning, no knowledge, no wisdom in the grave." (Ecclesiastes 9:10). If, however, by indulging in food, drink, immorality, etc., they are led astray from the ways of God, He will cause these curses to come upon them, so that they live in constant fear and confusion. They will lack the peace of mind and the stamina to fulfill the *mitzvos*, thereby they will not merit life in the is World to Come. Thus they will be deprived of two worlds. When a person is perturbed by sickness, war, and famine, in this world he finds it difficult to involve himself in wisdom or *mitzvos* to merit life in the World to Come.

### ***THE MESSIANIC AGE***

**[9:2]** Israel, their prophets and their Sages have yearned for the Messianic age to live without the oppression of governments that do not permit proper Torah study and fulfillment of *mitzvos*. In the Messianic age, they will have the proper tranquility<sup>61</sup> to enhance their Torah knowledge and practice, thus meriting the World to Come. In that era, knowledge, wisdom, and truth will flourish, as it says, "The earth will be full of the knowledge of God." (Yeshayahu 11:9). "No longer will they need to teach one another and say to one another, 'Know God', for all of them will know Me." (Jerimiyah 31:33). "I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh." (Yechezkiel 36:26).

The ruler who will be appointed by God and anointed as king, will be a descendant of the royal house of King David from the male lineage, and this ruler is referred to as Messiah, or the anointed one. This King will possess more wisdom than King Solomon, and his prophesy will be on a level only somewhat lower than that of Moses our teacher. He will teach the entire nation, showing them the path of God. The non-Jewish residents of the world will obey him, as it is written, "It will happen in the end of days. The Holy Temple will stand firm above the mountains ...and all the nations will flock to it." (Yeshayahu 2:2).

Although the supreme reward that will be endless and faultless, is life in the World to Come, however, during the Messianic age nature will continue according to its present rules<sup>62</sup>. The major difference will be that the world will be ruled by the laws of God through his anointed one, and the capital of the world will be in Jerusalem. The Sages have stated that the difference between man's previous history and the period of Messiah is that the world will be obedient to the rule of the anointed one, which was not so throughout past history.

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59. *By this explanation we understand that, even if a righteous person suffers, as long as he is able to follow the Torah, which merits him in the World to come, it is considered that he lived a good life.*

60. *By this same reasoning, even if he had a good life in this world, but if his life style caused him to veer from the ways of God, it is considered that he did not live a good life.*

61. *The tranquility will be a result of God weakening the evil inclination. When one is less interested in worldly pleasures, he becomes more interested in knowledge and understanding of the world we live in and in the future world. As the Torah learning and practice increases, the holiness of the world increases, so that God can bring the next stages of the Rising of the Dead, and the World to Come. Reward in the World to Come depends on how difficult it was for him to perform the mitzvos and if it was done out of love and happiness. Therefore, many righteous people who lived before the days of Messiah, have merited the World to Come no less than those who will have lived in the days of Messiah.*

62. *If there will be peace in the world then the world will not be governed by the present rules. Maimonides means that the basic rules of nature will continue unchanged. However, nature was created with the potentiality to respond to the increase of holiness within the creation by causing peace in the world.*

(Berachos 34b).

## CHAPTER TEN

### ***SERVING GOD OUT OF LOVE***

**[10:1]** A person should not say, "I will fulfill the *mitzvos* of the Torah, engrossing myself in its wisdom, to receive its blessings, thus meriting life in the World to Come." Nor should he say, "I will distance myself from all the sins the Torah cautions against, to be spared the curses listed in the Torah, so that my soul shall not be cut off from life in the World to Come." It is not right to serve God merely out of fear. Only unlearned people, serve God that way. To serve God out of fear is not the way of our prophets and wise men. Beginners at first serve God out of fear, and later when their intellect matures they are expected to serve Him out of love and joy.

**[10:2]** A person who serves God out of love busies himself with Torah study, and *mitzvos*, following the paths of wisdom, for the sake of the truth, and in the end, he will be rewarded. This high level of devotion is not easily attainable even by wise men. This is the level of worship attained by Abraham our Father. God described Abraham as "the one who loved Me." because he served God only out of love. God commanded us through Moses to serve Him with love, as it is written, "And you shall love the Lord your God." (Deuteronomy 6:5). When one loves God properly, he immediately fulfills the *mitzvos* out of love.

**[10:3]** What is the proper way to serve God out of love and joy? A person's love for God should be so powerful that his soul is bound up in his love for God. He is consumed with this love, as if he were lovesick. Just as an ignorant person who becomes lovesick for a woman, his thoughts dwell constantly on this woman, so must a God fearing person be obsessed with love for God. As it is written, "Love God ... with all your heart and with all your soul." (Deuteronomy 6:5). King Solomon expressed this figuratively, saying, "I am lovesick." (Song of Songs 2:5). The entire Song of Songs is an allegory portraying ones burning love for God.

**[10:4]** The Sages of the Talmud state, "A person should not say, I will learn Torah to become wealthy,<sup>63</sup> or to be called Rabbi, or to receive reward in the World to Come." Rather the Torah teaches, "If you are careful to pay heed to My commandments ... to love God." (Deuteronomy 11:13). Meaning, everything should be done out of love for God. The Sages also teach us that the verse, "Praiseworthy is the man who greatly desires His commandments," (Psalms 112:1), means, he desires His *mitzvos* but not the reward that results from doing his *mitzvos*. In the same vein, the Sages commanded their understanding students privately, "Do not be like servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward." (Avos 1:3). Since He is the Master, it is appropriate to serve Him out of love.

**[10:5]** One who studies Torah in order to receive reward or to be safe from punishment is not one who learns for God's sake. However, one who studies Torah, not out of fear of punishment nor to receive reward, but rather out of love for the Master of the earth Who commanded us, is learning for God's sake. Still, the Sages said, "By all means a person should engage in Torah study even if he does not study it out of joy and love, because by studying Torah he will eventually be elevated to worship God out of joy and love. (Pesachim 50b).

Therefore, teach children, women and unlearned people, to serve God out of fear and in order to receive a reward. As they advance, becoming more knowledgeable, this secret to serve God out of joy and love, should

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63. It is to be understood from the term "to become wealthy," that if one studies the Torah by living with necessities and not luxuries, he is studying out of love for his Creator. Maimonides in the laws of Studying Torah (chapter 3, paragraph 10,) states that it is forbidden to be paid in order to study Torah. Therefore, he is not permitted to accept even the necessities to study Torah unless he is not of age to work, or not able to work, or the like. Others disagree and permit a scholar to receive a salary.

be explained to them gradually, until they begin serving God out of love.

**[10:6]** It is well-known that one's heart will not be tied to love God unless he constantly works on his character to achieve this attribute. By ignoring all other physical pleasures in the world and knowing that the only true virtue is love for His Creator, he can achieve this attribute. As it is written, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul." (Deuteronomy 6:5). Your love for God is commensurate with your knowledge of Him, the more you know Him, the more you love Him. If you know Him a little, you will love him a little. "If you know Him well, you will love Him more ardently. Therefore, a person must dedicate himself to become wise and to achieve fluent knowledge and understanding of his Creator, to the point that is humanly possible, as we explained in *Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah*.