

Meeting the Real You: Prep work for your Jewish New Years Resolution

Source Sheet by Rabbi Reuven Ibragimov

1. **Rambam Hilchot Teshuva 1** .א
 What is complete repentance: a person who came upon the matter regarding which he transgressed and has the ability to commit [the act], but he refrained and did not commit [the act] because of teshuva, and not out of fear or deficient strength. How is this? Such as a person who had sinful relations with a woman and later was secluded with her, and he retains his love for her and physical strength...but he refrains and does not transgress – this is a person of complete teshuva.

2. **Maharal Nesivos Olam 2 Nesiv Hateshuva ch. 3** .ב
 When it says ‘in the same place with the same woman’ it doesn’t mean that is the only way to repent. What would happen if the woman would die – would repentance be impossible? Rather it means that if a person is so upset by the sin that he certainly would not transgress the same sin again even if he would be confronted with it now, he is called a ‘master of repentance’. He has completely repented from his sin. But if he is not that upset by the sin he is not called a ‘master of repentance’.

3. **Teshuva is made up of 3 Stages** .ג
 1 Past - Regret
 2. Present - viduy - speaking out or Confessing what was done negative
 3. and Future - acceptance for the future not to do it again

Rambams four steps to Teshuva:
 Step 1 - **Regret**. Realize the extent of the damage and feel sincere regret.
 Step 2 - **Cessation**. Immediately stop the harmful action.
 Step 3 - **Confession**. Articulate the mistake and ask for forgiveness.
 Step 4 - **Resolution**. Make a firm commitment not to repeat it in the future.

4. **Ramchal Mesillat Yesarim** .ד
 According to strict justice, there should be no correction at all for a sin, for in truth, how can a man straighten that which he has made crooked, when the sin is already done? If a man murdered his neighbor ... how can this be corrected? Can he wipe out the act from existence? ... Rather, repentance is granted to sinners as an act of pure lovingkindness, so that the cancellation of the will be considered the cancellation of the act.

Once a crime has been committed, the mere expression of regret and repentance does not suffice to protect the criminal from conviction though it might be a mitigating factor when meting out punishment.

5. **Rav Elchanan Wasserman Kovetz Maamarim, p.23** .7

The Gemara in Kiddushin (40b) states that even one who was righteous all his life can lose all merit if he rebels at the end. The Gemara asks: Should he not be considered as having a mixed record; i.e., have his mitzvot count, with the sin of his old age added to the record.

"Resh Lakish said: This refers to one who doubts the earlier actions (i.e., he regrets the mitzvot he performed)." We see here that regret obliterates the mitzvot performed as though they never occurred. Since mercy and grace are not at work here, does this not indicate that it is justice which demands that regret cancel good deeds? If so, it should surely cancel sins by the same token. Chofetz Chaim answer: it depends on the nature of the teshuva. The Gemara states that teshuva m'ahava (repentance out of love; i.e., heartfelt regret) results in the transgressions being transmuted into merits, whereas teshuva miyira (repentance out of fear) results in transgressions being transmuted into shegagot unintentional lapses. Justice indeed requires that one who genuinely regrets his actions not be held accountable for them; however, that the transgressions be considered as merits is an act of pure mercy. Hence, one who does teshuvah m'ahavah is forgiven out of justice, and mercy is required for him only in order to reach the higher level where his sins are transmuted into merits. On the other hand, one who simply fears imminent punishment but does not genuinely regret his misdeeds, has no claim to justice and the efficacy of his teshuvah is completely dependent on God's mercy.

6. **Rav Elchanan Wasserman Kovetz Maamarim, p.23** .1

I reject the applicability of this answer to the statement of the Mesillat Yesharim, which indicates that even one who has completely and sincerely regretted his actions requires the attribute of mercy in order for his repentance to be effective. All mitzvot and all transgressions have two aspects. The first is that they represent obedience or rebellion visavis the word of God. This is expressed in the Talmudic statement that one who is commanded and performs a mitzva is greater than one who volunteers. The second is the positive or negative influence that the action has on his soul. Every commandment of God has a value and effect for the one who performs it. Regret corrects the aspect of sin whereby one has rebelled against God. Having repented, one's relationship with God can return to its earlier prerebellion state. However, the actual consequences of the act are unaffected by one's psychological regret. Here, the miraculous mercy of God shines forth, and He repairs the damage to the sinner, to his soul, and to the world, granting him atonement and purification as a response to his repentance.

7. **Rav Hutner Pachad Yitchak, Rosh Hashana 74** .1

The Gemara in Kiddushin does not support the conclusion that regret can cancel sin in any sense, for the paths leading from evil to good and that leading from good to evil are not analogous. The Torah teaches us that the dichotomy of good and evil is equivalent to that of life and death. The evolution of life into death is a natural, universal phenomenon. However, the opposite is

unknown, so much so that techiyat hameitim, the resurrection, is considered the greatest of all miracles. Life must be constantly supported with food, water, and air, whereas death is a self sufficient state which requires no effort to maintain. The same is true of good and evil. Good, even after it has come into being, must be sustained, else it loses its vitality and progressively decays. The food, the sustenance, of good, is the faith of man in its value. A man who regrets the good he has done, who no longer believes in it, destroys its foundation of existence in this world of natural law. The opposite is not true, however. Like death, evil, once it comes into existence, will continue to exist by means of inertia, and there is no natural way to transform it. Only God's infinite power and mercy can restore life where once it has been removed, and replace evil with good. Hence, teshuva depends totally on God's grace.

8. **Teshuva Mediation Coming from the Body**
REGRET: The Seven Inspirations for a Deep Tshuva, Simplified

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Ask yourself the following:

1. **How could I have done this to my body? To set myself up for such physical suffering?**
– Here we acknowledge that our sins bring in their wake suffering which is not occurring by chance
2. **How could I have been so cruel to my soul?**
– The soul detests physical indulgence and sin, and is only happy with Torah and Mitzvos
3. **How could I have made such a poor trade-off?**
– Grabbed some temporary sweetness at the expense of endless pleasure and closeness to G-d? Do the math
4. **How could I have acted like an animal?**
– How does it feel to be called a pig? An animal is not guided by reason and neither are we when we sin
5. **Do you realize who you are?**
– An image of God
What you have?
– A lofty soul
And what it's for?
– To serve Achieve our purpose
Our sins are a serious misuse of these gifts and privileges
6. **When I've sinned I've dropped two levels down**
– I have less consciousness of G-d than an animal has of its master
7. **How could I have forgotten the day of my death?**
– This humbling realization should fill our "body" with regret.

