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Sincerely,

Rabbi Yehoshua Werde  
Director

P.s. Please email me with any comments or questions at [Director@torahlp.com](mailto:Director@torahlp.com)

ב"ה

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# ELUL AND TESHUVAH

*Is It Really Possible  
to Turn Back the Clock?*



# Lesson Outline

- Why Elul?
- The History of Elul
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# Elul and Teshuvah

Teshuvah is a lifelong process of personal growth, of overcoming challenges, and of unleashing latent human potential.

## Why Elul?

While every day is a good day for teshuvah, some days stand out from others as particularly opportune moments to do teshuvah. The forty days between Rosh Chodesh Elul and Yom Kippur is such a time. Just as in business, the year's end is a time to take stock of profits and losses, before the Jewish new year, we review our performance for the year that has gone by:

*Reishis Chochma, Shaar Hateshuvah, 4*

עוד יש ימים שנהגו ישראל להתענות בהם, כגון מראש חודש אלול עד יום הכיפורים שהם ימים שאומרים בהם סליחות ותחנונים, וסמכו על זה (שיר השירים ד) "אני לדודי ודודי לי" ראשי תיבות אלול, וסופי תיבות ד' יודין כנגד מ' יום...ומסתברא מאחר שהוא החודש האחרון מהשנה לעשות בו תשובה על מה שפגם בכל השנה, ולא יכנס בראש השנה שהוא יום הדין מתועב ממעשיו הרעים, אלא יתקן בחדש זה מה שעבר

*There are other days that Jews are accustomed to fasting on, for example from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur which are days upon which we recite selichos and they found a basis for this [from the posuk] (Shir Hashirim 4) "I am to my beloved, and my beloved is to me" the opening letters [of each word spell out] Elul and the final letters [of*

*each word] are four Yuds corresponding to the 40 days...and being the final month of the year it makes sense to be used to do teshuvah for the entire year's transgressions, so as not to enter into Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgement, filthy from ones wicked deeds, rather one should rectify during this month that which one transgressed.*

### **The History of Elul**

Historically, these forty days between Rosh Chodesh Elul and Yom Kippur commemorate the third set of forty days that Moshe spent on Har Sinai:

*Rashi, Shmos 32:1 and 33:11*

בשבעה בסיון עלה, נמצא יום ארבעים בשבעה עשר בתמוז...בשבעה עשר בתמוז נשתברו הלוחות, ובשמונה עשר שרף את העגל ודן את החוטאים, ובתשעה עשר עלה...עשה שם ארבעים יום ובקש רחמים... ובראש חדש אלול נאמר לו (שמות לד ב) ועלית בבקר אל הר סיני, לקבל לוחות האחרונות, ועשה שם ארבעים יום... בעשרה בתשרי נתרצה הקב"ה לישראל בשמחה ובלב שלם, ואמר לו למשה סלחתי כדברך, ומסר לו לוחות אחרונות.

*On 7 Sivan, Moses went up onto the mountain . . . On 17 Tammuz, the tablets were broken. On the 18th, he burned the [Golden] Calf and judged the transgressors. On the 19th, he went up...for forty days and pleaded for mercy...On 1 Elul, he was told, "And in the morning you shall ascend Mount Sinai" (Shmos 34:2) to receive the second tablets, and he*

*spent forty days there.... On 10 Tishrei, Hashem restored His goodwill with the Jewish people gladly and wholeheartedly, saying to Moshe, "I have forgiven, as you ask," and gave him the Second Tablets.*

Moshe originally ascended Har Sinai on Shavuot; forty days later, on the 17th of Tamuz (Shiva Asar B'Tamuz) Moshe returned from the mountain to find the Jews worshipping the egel hazahav (the golden calf). Moshe broke the luchos and ascended on the 19th for another forty days to plead with Hashem to spare the Jewish people. He then ascended for another forty days beginning Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur to receive the new set of luchos and that is when Hashem finally said "I have forgiven you."

During these days, Moshe Rabeinu was let-in on a special secret:

*Talmud Bavli, Rosh Hashanah 17a*

ויעבור ה' על פניו ויקרא אמר רבי יוחנן...מלמד שנתעטף הקדוש ברוך הוא כשליח צבור והראה לו למשה סדר תפלה אמר לו כל זמן שישראל חוטאין יעשו לפני כסדר הזה ואני מוחל להם

*"And Hashem passed before him [Moshe] and proclaimed" Rav Yochanan said: ...it teaches that Hashem wrapped Himself (in a talis) like a shaliach tzibbur, and showed Moshe the order of prayer. Whenever the Jewish people sin, they should do like this [invoking Hashem's 13 Attributes of Mercy] order, and I will forgive them.*

This is why during these days (Elul and Aseres Yemei Teshuvah) we recite selichos in which we frequently invoke the 13 middos harachamim (attributes of mercy).

1. Hashem — compassion before a person sins;
2. Hashem — compassion after a person has sinned;
3. Keil — mighty in compassion to give all creatures according to their need;
4. Rachum — merciful, that humankind may not be distressed;
5. VeChanun — and gracious if humankind is already in distress;
6. Erech appayim — slow to anger;
7. VeRav chesed — and plenteous in mercy;
8. VeEmes — and truth;
9. Notzer chesed laalafim — keeping mercy unto thousands;
10. Noseh avon — forgiving iniquity;
11. VeVafeshah — and transgression;
12. VeChata'ah — and sin;
13. VeNakeh — and pardoning.

Even though according to the Ashkenazi custom, we only recite selichos during the week of Rosh Hashanah (and the week before Rosh Hashanah, when Rosh Hashanah falls out early on in the week), even for us there is special significance to the entire month of Elul, as explained in Chassidus:

באלול מתחיל בחי' אני לדודי...עד ר"ה ויזה"כ שהם בחי' המשכת  
אלהותו ית' למטה בבחי' התגלות...אלול הוא זמן התגלות י"ג מדות  
הרחמים

*Elul begins the service of "I am to my beloved"...  
until Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, for then  
Hashem's G-dliness is drawn down below into a  
revealed state...Elul is a time when Hashem's 13  
attributes of mercy are revealed.*

Elul is a time when Hashem's deepest compassion for the Jewish people is revealed. Usually, on days when there is a special revelation of Hashem's presence, it is marked as a special day on the calendar, like Shabbos and Yom Tov. The Alter Rebbe asks, why are the days of Elul treated as regular workdays and not as special days like Shabbos and Yom Tov?

The Alter Rebbe answers this question by way of a parable:

### **King in the Field**

*Ibid.*

משל למלך שקודם בואו לעיר יוצאין אנשי העיר לקראתו ומקבלין פניו  
בשדה ואז רשאים כל מי שרוצה לצאת להקביל פניו הוא מקבל את  
כולם בסבר פנים יפות ומראה פנים שוחקות לכולם. ובלכתו העירה  
הרי הם הולכים אחריו. ואח"כ בבואו להיכל מלכותו אין נכנסים כ"א  
ברשות ואף גם זאת המובחרים שבעם ויחידי סגולה.

*This is analogous to a king who, before entering the  
royal city, the townsfolk come out to greet him and  
receive him in the field, and then, whoever so wishes*

*is granted a reception with the king and he receives all with a graceful and radiant countenance. And when he enters the city, they follow him. However, once he arrives at his royal court, entrance is granted by special permission and only to a select and distinguished few.*

Throughout the year—including on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur—to come before Hashem requires much preparation, sanctifying oneself by learning Torah, davening, and even fasting. For on all other times, in order to stand before Hashem, we must gain access to His royal court. During the month of Elul, however, Hashem comes out to us wherever we may be and in whatever situation we find ourselves in. All doors are open to us, we need only go out to greet Him in the field. We do this by returning to Hashem through Teshuvah.

### **What does Teshuvah accomplish?**

*Yeshayahu 59:2*

**כִּי אִם-עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם, הִיוּ מְבַדְּלִים, בֵּינֵיכֶם, לְבֵין אֱלֹהֵיכֶם; וְחַטָּאוֹתֵיכֶם, הִסְתִּירוּ פָנִים מִכֶּם-מִשְׁמוֹעַ**

*For your sins have come between you and your G-d, and your transgressions have caused Him to hide His countenance from you, from hearing [you].*

*Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 7:7*

**כמה מעולה מעלת התשובה אמש היה זה מובדל מה' אלקי ישראל שנאמר עונותיכם היו מבדילים ביניכם לבין אלקיכם...והיום הוא מודבק בשכינה שנאמר ואתם הדבקים בה' אלקיכם...**

*How wonderful is teshuvah! One day a person can be separated from the Lord, God of Israel, as it is written, “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God ...” – and on the next he can be attached to the Divine Presence, as it is written, “But you who are attached to the Lord your God ...”*

### **“Return” Not “Repent”**

Teshuvah is conventionally translated as “repentance.” Repentance suggests that the person is a penitent, an evildoer, a person with a poor character that needs to change. The Rebbe insisted that this was a mistake, Teshuvah means “tashuv hei,” to return to Hashem, to return to the spark of Hashem that you are, to reveal the true you. Teshuvah brings out our strengths, not our weaknesses.

This is a fundamental shift in the way we view ourselves. People tend to be inclined to resist teshuvah, as it requires us to own up to our misdeeds, and who wants to do that? However, the point and message of teshuvah is quite the opposite, that we are not defined by our faults, we are essentially good people and no sin can change that. Teshuvah is the realization of this fact. Through teshuvah we break out of the guilt-laden, limited, self-deprecating mindset that we are sinners, to recognize and appreciate our essential worth that is infinitely good and cannot possibly be tainted by sin, and then make practical changes to restructure our lives to live up to our full potential.

## Teshuvah with Joy

Thus, the approach of Chassidus to teshuvah is that it should be done joyfully. Seemingly, teshuvah and joy are divergent emotions. The impetus for teshuvah is regret and remorse, an unlikely source of joy. What is the joy in doing teshuvah? The Alter Rebbe addresses this question with a parable:

*Tanya, Ch. 31*

אין לך שמחה גדולה כצאת מהגלות והשביה כמשל בן מלך שהיה  
בשביה וטוהן בבית האסורים ומנוול באשפה ויצא לחפשי אל בית אביו  
המלך

*There is no greater joy than the escape from exile and imprisonment, as in the example of the king's son who was kept in captivity, grinding [corn], in prison and becoming covered with filth; then he is liberated and he returns to his father's royal house.*

Teshuvah provides an opportunity for the neshamah to return to Hashem, like a prince who was imprisoned and then freed to return home to his father, the king. Even though captivity is a matter of great distress, when the prince focuses on the destination, there can be no greater source of joy. Similarly, we can choose to let our past dominate our emotions and arouse bitter emotions, or we can focus on the destination, and the teshuvah can become our greatest source of Joy.

## Does Teshuvah Mean to Feel Guilty?

There's a common misconception that teshuvah means to feel guilty about what you've done wrong.

GUILT VS. REGRET: Teshuvah actually frees us from being

weighed down by feelings of guilt, and allows us to move beyond our wrongdoings, and reconnect with Hashem, with ourselves, and with others.

## **Cognitive Dissonance**

*Wikipedia, Cognitive Dissonance*

*In psychology, cognitive dissonance is the mental stress or discomfort experienced by an individual who holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values at the same time, or is confronted by new information that conflicts with existing beliefs, ideas, or values.*

For example, the stress that is induced when a person smokes (behavior) and they know that smoking causes cancer (cognition).

The cognitive dissonance theory suggests that we have an inner drive to hold all our attitudes and beliefs in harmony and avoid disharmony (or dissonance).

When a person does Teshuvah, he realigns his beliefs and behaviors, repairing the state of cognitive dissonance that was created

So while we first and foremost do teshuvah because it is a mitzvah (i.e., it's our duty as Jews), there are also personal fringe benefits that come along with doing teshuvah, i.e., the psychological relief in repairing cognitive dissonance.

## **Turning Back the Clock—Can We Change the**

## Past?

The mitzvah of teshuvah is to rectify a wrongdoing we did in the past. What was done is done, how is it possible for us to change our actions in the past?

*Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 54a*

שבעה דברים נבראו קודם שנברא העולם ואלו הן תורה ותשובה ...

*Seven things were created before the world. They are: the Torah, teshuvah ...*

*The Dynamics of Teshuvah, Rabbi Dr. Immanuel J. Schochet OBM*

*The power of teshuvah derives from its transcendent nature. Like Torah, teshuvah preceded the Creation. It is not part of the world, of Creation, of a creative process. It is beyond time, beyond space, rooted in infinity. In the sphere of infinity, past and present fade into oblivion.*

Since teshuvah transcends the dimension of time, it allows us to change the impact of past misdeeds.

## How Does One Do Teshuvah?

*Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 2:2,9*

ומה היא התשובה? הוא שיעזוב החוטא חטאו ויסירנו ממחשבתו, ויגמור בלבו שלא יעשהו עוד ... וכן יתנחם על שעבר ... וצריך להתודות בשפתיו ולומר עניינות אלו שגמר בלבו.

*How does one do teshuvah? The transgressor stops doing the transgression and removes it from his*

*thoughts. He resolves that he will not do it again in the future... He regrets [that which he did] in the past ... He verbally expresses his wrongdoings to God and makes a verbal resolution for the future.*

There are four steps to doing teshuvah:

1. Regret having done it
2. Stop doing it
3. Own up to doing it (verbally)
4. Resolve to never do it again

There is also a fifth step, and that is, if your misdeed was directed, not at Hashem, but at another person, before you can do teshuvah you must make it up to the person you wronged and receive his/her forgiveness.

## **Transforming Aveiros into Mitzvos**

*Talmud Bavli, Yoma 86b*

אמר ריש לקיש גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו כשגגות... והאמר ריש לקיש גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו כזכויות... לא קשיא כאן מאהבה כאן מיראה.

*Reish Lakish said, "Great is teshuvah, for when the sinner repents his sins are accounted as if he had committed them unintentionally ..."* Yet surely, *Reish Lakish said that teshuvah is great because [through it] a person's sins are accounted as merits ... This is not a difficulty since the first statement*

*refers to repentance out of fear, whereas the second statement refers to repentance out of love.*

How is it possible for a sin to become a merit?

*Likutei Sichos Vol. 17 p. 189-190*

וויבאלד אז די תשובה מאהבה מיט אזא צמאון איז געווארן ארויסגערופן  
דורך די זדונות, דערפאר ווערן די זדונות גופא כוכיות

*Since the teshuvah out of love with such a thirst was brought about by the sins, for this reason the sins themselves become merits*

I.e., it is impossible to achieve this degree of teshuvah (i.e., teshuvah out of love) without the sin to ignite the desire for teshuvah, hence the sin becomes part of the mitzvah of teshuvah (a merit). (For the record: Don't try this at home! One is still not allowed to sin with the intention of reaching this level of teshuvah and transforming his sin into a mitzvah)

### **What Do We Change?**

When we do teshuvah, we're not just fixing up the aveiros we did, we're changing who we are. To the extent that the Rambam writes that a person who does teshuvah should change his name:

*Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 2:5[4]*

משנה שמו, כלומר שאני אחר ואיני אותו האיש שעשה אותן המעשים;  
ומשנה מעשיו כולן לטובה, ולדרך ישרה.

*He changes his name, so as to say "I am a different person, and I am no longer the person who did those*

acts;” and he changes his actions to only good ones, and to [follow] a straight path.

There are two types of teshuvah: One is to break bad habits and the other is to become a different person, i.e., overcome deep-rooted negative traits and tendencies that are essential to one's character:

## Teshuvah as Character-Development

*Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 7:3*

אל תאמר שאין תשובה אלא מעבירות שיש בהן מעשה כגון זנות וגזל וגניבה, אלא כשם שצריך אדם לשוב מאלו, כך הוא צריך לחפש בדעות רעות שיש לו ולשוב מן הכעס, ומן האיבה, ומן הקנאה, ומן ההתול, ומרדיפת הממון והכבוד, ומרדיפת המאכלות וכיוצא בהן מן הכל צריך לחזור בתשובה. ואלו העונות קשים מאותן שיש בהן מעשה, שבזמן שאדם נשקע באלו קשה הוא לפרוש מהם

*It is a mistake to think that teshuvah is required only for actions done with one's body, such as immoral relations, theft, or robbery. Rather, one is required to search out and do teshuvah even for negative character traits and incorrect life attitudes. Examples requiring teshuvah include: anger; hatred; jealousy; mockery; excessively chasing after money, honor, and food; and all similar negative traits. These character faults are harder to deal with than wrong actions, because it is very difficult to eradicate a character fault that is enmeshed [in one's personality].*

## Can People Change Who They Are?

On May 21, 1924, Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, two wealthy Chicago teens kidnapped and murdered 14-year-old Bobby Franks, just for the thrill of it. To everyone's surprise, in court, their lawyer saved them from what was thought to be a certain death penalty by arguing that they were not responsible for the murder because they had no choice in the matter; it was their nature and upbringing that was responsible for leading them to their decisions and actions and they could do nothing to change that.

Even in Torah we find that a person has tendencies that are impossible to change:

*Toras Chaim Shemot vol. 1 203a*

מדות הטבעיים הנולדים בטבע מבטן אמו שלא יוכל לשנותם כלל  
מהיפך להיפך כמו מרחמנות לאכזריות ומפזרנות לקמצנות או להיפך  
כו' עד שמגיע[ים ה]מדות הללו בעצם הנפש ממש כנ"ל שהוא בלתי  
שינויים כלל.

*A person's natural tendencies that appear naturally from his mother's womb, these cannot be changed at all from one extreme to the other, like from mercy to cruel, or from spendthriftness to miserliness or the opposite, to the extent that these traits are actually rooted in the soul's core that is unchangeable.*

On the other hand, we do find that such change is possible. We know that Avraham Avinu personified kindness and love, as the posuk describes:

Yeshayahu 41:8

אֲבֹרָהֶם אֱהָבִי

*Avraham who loves me.*

Yet, after Avraham was willing to bind Yitzchak on a mizbeiach at Hashem's behest, the posuk describes him as being "in awe of Hashem" (awe is the opposite nature to that of love):

Bereishis 22:1-12

כִּי עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי יִרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶתְּךָ וְלֹא חִשַּׁבְתָּ אֶת בְּנֶךָ אֶת יִחִידְךָ מִמֶּנִּי:

*For now I know that you stand in awe of Hashem, since you have not withheld your son, your only one, from Me.*

If Avraham's essential character was one of love, how was he able to switch gears and do something that was contrary to his essential nature?

Tanya, Igeres Hakodesh, 13

כל המדות כלולות זו מזו. ולכן הם מיוחדות זו בזו... וכדכתיב באברהם שהוא מדת החסד והאהבה עתה ידעתי כי ירא אלהים אתה ע"י שלבש מדת הגבורה ועקוד את יצחק בנו ויקח את המאכלת כו'

*All the traits incorporate each other, they are therefore in union with each other... Thus it is written of Avraham, who personifies the attribute of Chesed and love, "Now I know that you stand in awe of Hashem," — for he had garbed himself in*

*the attribute of Gevurah, “And bound Yitzchok his son...and took the knife [to slaughter his son].”*

While it may be impossible for a person to run contrary to an essential trait, every human being can find within themselves every possible trait, only that some are more dominant than others. Thus it is possible to develop a sub-dominant trait until it eclipses the formerly dominant one. For example, a miserly person who is stingy by nature cannot do away with the stingy nature, but he can find within himself some faint trace of kindness, and develop that trait until it becomes the dominant one.

In recent decades, science has discovered that we can change the physical makeup of our brains by exercising certain neural pathways and disregarding others. This means when we practice thinking and behaving in ways that run contrary to our essential tendencies, we literally are reshaping the our brain and transforming our natural tendencies.

*Wikipedia, Neuroplasticity*

*Neuroplasticity, also known as brain plasticity, refers to changes in neural pathways and synapses which are due to changes in behavior, environment and neural processes.*

So we have the power to become anyone we make our minds up to be, and as we see in the following story, when we choose to undergo radical teshuvah by changing our core tendencies, nothing can be more valuable in Hashem’s eyes:

## A Story: Measuring Life's Accomplishments

*Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zarah 18a*

כשחלה רבי יוסי בן קיסמא, הלך רבי חנינא בן תרדיון לבקר. אמר לו: חנינא אחי, (אחי) אי אתה יודע שאומה זו מן השמים המליכה? שהחריבה את ביתו ושרפה את היכלו, והרגה את חסידיו ואבדה את טוביו, ועדיין היא קיימת, ואני שמעתי עליך שאתה יושב ועוסק בתורה [ומקהיל קהלות ברבים] וספר מונח לך בחיקך! אמר לו: מן השמים ירחמו. אמר לו: אני אומר לך דברים של טעם, ואתה אומר לי מן השמים ירחמו, תמה אני אם לא ישרפו אותך ואת ספר תורה באש! אמר לו: רבי, מה אני לחיי העולם הבא? אמר לו: כלום מעשה בא לידך? אמר לו: מעות של פורים נתחלפו לי במעות של צדקה וחלקתים לעניים, אמר לו: אם כן, מחלקך יהי חלקי ומגורלך יהי גורלי

*When Rabbi Yosei ben Kisma became ill, Rabbi Chanina ben Teradyon went to visit him. [Rabbi Yosei] said to [Rabbi Chanina]: “Chanina, my brother! Do you not know that from heaven they have imposed as rulers this [Roman] nation which has destroyed [Hashem’s] house, burned His sanctuary, killed His pious ones, and caused His nobles to perish, and this [foreign ruler] still exists and yet I have heard about you that you sit and engage in Torah study and convene gatherings in public [to disseminate Torah,] and a scroll rests in your lap! [Why do you endanger yourself so?]” [Rabbi Chanina] said to [Rabbi Yosei in reply]: “From heaven they will have mercy [on me.]” [Rabbi Yosei] responded to him: “I am saying something sensible to you, and you are telling*

me that from Heaven they will have mercy!?! I would be amazed if they do not burn you and the Torah scroll in fire!" [Rabbi Chanina] said to [Rabbi Yosei]: "Rebbi, how do I stand with regard to the world to come?" [Rabbi Yosei] said to him: "Has any incident presented itself to you?" [Rabbi Chanina] answered him: "I once inadvertently switched my own Purim funds with general charity funds, and I distributed [the Purim funds] to the poor." [Rabbi Yosei] said to [Rabbi Chanina]: "If that is so, let my portion be from your portion and let my lot be from your lot!"

1. Rabbi Chanina risked his life to teach Torah in spite of the Roman edict outlawing it. With such a merit in hand, why did Rabbi Chanina still doubt whether he was deserving of the world to come?

2. After discussing Rabbi Chanina's self-sacrifice to teach Torah despite the threat to his life, there was still doubt as to his status vis-a-vis the world to come. Only when he mentioned the deed of distributing his personal Purim funds to the poor did his portion in the world to come become an obvious fact. Why did the distribution of personal funds to the poor eclipse his self-sacrifice for teaching Torah as the cause for his meriting a coveted place in the world to come?

*Maamarei Admur Hazaken 5569, p. 23*

רחב"ת, הגם שמסר נפשו על התורה הי' מפקפק ומסתפק מאד פן יש במס"נ זאת האלקי תערובות הסכם הטבעי דנה"ב שאינו נק' עובד אלקים עדיין...וע"כ שאל מהו לעוה"ב שלא יזכה בו רק העובד

אלקי'....והשיבו כלום מעשה בא לידו בהיפוך הטבע לגמרי וא"ל ממעות של פורים כו' להיות שטבע השקידה וההתמדה בתשוקה על דברי חכ' שרשה באה ממרה השחורה שהיא גורמת עוצם בחי' הכיווץ בעצמו והיא הגורמת מדת הקמצנות בממון כנראה בחוש בטבעי כנ"א אך מדת הפזרנות שהוא בחי' ההתפשטו' היפך הכיווץ שרשה ממרה הלבינה והוא היפך טבע השקידה וההתמדה לצמצם ולכווץ א"ע כו' וכאשר א"ל ממעשה פיזור הצדקה הבין בטבעו הגשמי שהוא פזרן שהוא מנגד גדול לטבע השקידה וההתמדה ואז א"ל א"כ מחלקך יהא חלקי כו' דהיינו מפני שראה שאין תערובו' הסכם טבעי כלל במס"נ שלו על התורה ונק' עובד אלקים כנ"ל וראוי הוא לעוה"ב.

*Although Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon had risked his life for Torah, he was very doubtful and unsure perhaps his Godly self-sacrifice was diluted by the natural agreement of the animal soul—which did not suffice to be considered one “who serves Hashem.” He therefore questioned: “How do I stand with regard to the world to come?” since only those who serve Hashem merit it. ...[Rabbi Yosei] responded [by asking] whether any incident presented itself to him that was completely against his nature to which he replied regarding the money of Purim, since the nature of diligence, persistence, and a desire for wisdom is rooted in melancholy which makes a person closed and withholding, the cause of a miserly temperament in financial matters, as can be seen openly in the nature of people. However, spendthriftiness is a temperament of expansion—the opposite of withholding—which is a function of cheerfulness and runs contrary*

*to the diligent and persistent nature to minimize, withhold, and squeeze yourself. And when he told him of the story of distributing the charity, he sensed in his physical nature that he is a spendthrift which is largely opposed to the nature of diligence and persistence. Then [Rabbi Yosei] said to him: “If that is so, let my portion be from your portion,” which means that he saw that there were no natural tendencies at all mixed in to his self-sacrifice for Torah and he is considered “one who serves Hashem” and is thus deserving of the world to come.*

## Take-aways

- Elul is when Hashem forgave us for the golden calf and has ever since been a time for teshuvah
- Elul is a time when the bar is lowered and Hashem is easily accessible through teshuvah
- Teshuvah means to return to Hashem by breaking down the barriers, i.e., the aveiros that complicate our relationship with Hashem
- Teshuvah is a joyful experience as there can be no greater joy than the soul returning from captivity to the palace of our Father, the King
- Teshuvah entails regret, not guilt. In fact, teshuvah can relieve feelings of guilt created by cognitive dissonance
- Teshuvah can change the past because, like Torah, it was created before the world and transcends the dimension of time
- Teshuvah is a four-step process that entails regret, cessation of sin, owning up to ones misdeeds, and a resolve never to repeat them
- Even deep-rooted tendencies can be changed by exercising ones sub-dominant traits to make them dominant ones
- The true measure of achievement in life is when one is able to go against the grain of their character, to do what is difficult



