

Teshuva – Masechet Avoda Zarah 17a

נטל כיס דינרין והלך ועבר עליה שבעה נהרות בשעת הרגל דבר הפיחה אמרה כשם שהפיחה זו אינה חוזרת למקומה כך אלעזר בן דורדיא אין מקבלין אותו בתשובה

כי ההרים ימושו (ישעיהו נד, י) הלך וישב בין שני הרים וגבעות אמר הרים וגבעות בקשו עלי רחמים אמרו לו עד שאנו מבקשים עליך נבקש על עצמנו שנאמר כי שמים כעשן נמלחו והארץ כבגד (ישעיהו נא, ו) והגבעות תמוטינה אמר שמים וארץ בקשו עלי רחמים אמרו עד שאנו מבקשים עליך נבקש על עצמנו שנאמר תבלה

אמר אין הדבר תלוי אלא בי הניח ראשו בין ברכיו וגעה בבכיה עד שיצתה נשמתו יצתה בת קול ואמרה ר"א בן דורדיא מזומן לחיי העולם הבא [והא הכא בעבירה הוה ומית] התם נמי כיון דאביק בה טובא כמינות דמיא

The Gemara asks: And is it correct that one who repents of the sin of forbidden sexual intercourse does not die? But isn't it taught in a baraita: They said about Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaiya that he was so promiscuous that he did not leave one prostitute in the world with whom he did not engage in sexual intercourse. Once, he heard that there was one prostitute in one of the cities overseas who would take a purse full of dinars as her payment. He took a purse full of dinars and went and crossed seven rivers to reach her. When they were engaged in the matters to which they were accustomed (a euphemism for intercourse) she passed wind and said: Just as this passed wind will not return to its place, so too Elazar ben Durdaiya will not be accepted in repentance, even if he were to try to repent.

This statement deeply shocked Elazar ben Durdaiya, and he went and sat between two mountains and hills and said: Mountains and hills, pray for mercy on my behalf, so that my repentance will be accepted. They said to him: Before we pray for mercy on your behalf, we must pray for mercy on our own behalf, as it is stated: "For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed" (Isaiah 54:10). He said: Heaven and earth, pray for mercy on my behalf. They said to him: Before we pray for mercy on your behalf, we must pray for mercy on our own behalf, as it is stated: "For the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment" (Isaiah 51:6).

Elazar ben Durdaiya said: Clearly the matter depends on nothing other than myself. He placed his head between his knees and cried loudly until his soul left his body. A Divine Voice emerged and said: Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaiya is destined for life in the World-to-Come. The Gemara explains the difficulty presented by this story: And here Elazar ben Durdaiya was guilty of the sin of forbidden sexual intercourse, and yet he died once he repented. The Gemara answers: There too, since he was attached so strongly to the sin, to an extent that transcended the physical temptation he felt, it is similar to heresy, as it had become like a form of idol worship for him.

A discussion on Teshuva based on Masechet Avoda Zarah 17a

Textual Questions:

- “Before we pray for mercy on your behalf, we must pray for mercy on our own behalf” Do you agree with this quote? What does this mean for individuals praying on behalf of a community?
- Do you think that a person can become so inherently attached to sin that there is no way for them to do Teshuva? Has Hashem ever deemed a person beyond the point of Teshuva

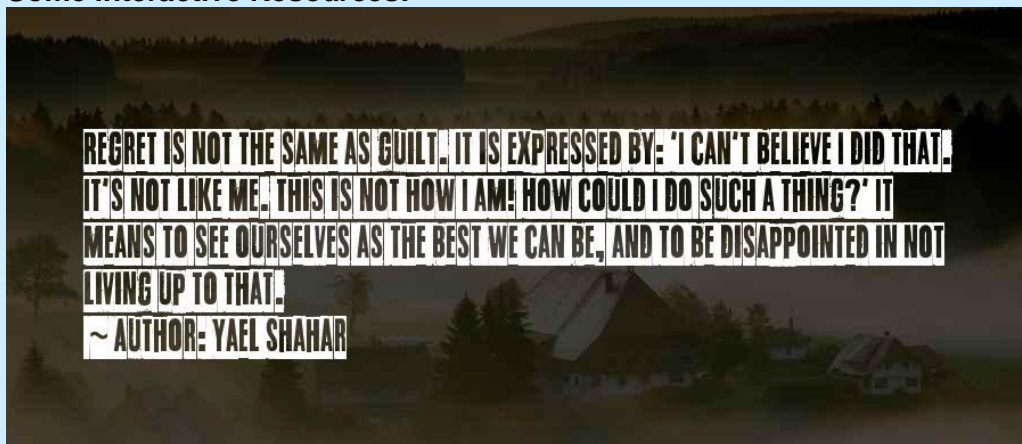
General Questions:

- Is it more valuable to do an Avera and do Teshuva for it or to not do it at all?
- Do you think that people need to experience doing an Avera in order to know that it is wrong or can they know so intuitively?
- What is the best way to do Teshuvah for an action/When is a person's Teshuvah for an Avera complete? Can a person's Teshuvah for an Avera they continue to do repeatedly be forgiven?

Personal Questions:

- Do you think that you do effective Teshuvah on Yom Kippur/at other points in the year? How do you think you could improve your process of Teshuvah

Some Interactive Resources:



Video - Shouldn't the day of Judgement come AFTER the day of Repentance?!
– J-TV

A related story from the Baal Shem Tov

How we should strive to be close to God through any means, including teshuva:

"Once there was a very wise king. He made [an] illusory [castle with illusory] walls, towers and gates. Then he commanded that [his subjects] should come to him through the [illusory walls and] gates and the towers. Then he scattered before each and every gate royal treasures. [In this way] when someone came to the first gate, he took the money and left. And so it went [with one seeker after another] until the beloved son came with great determination and proceeded [to walk through one wall after another] right up to his father the king. Then he realized that there was nothing separating himself from his father. Everything was an illusion."

Other sources and quotes to bring into discussion:

Mesechet Brachot

In the place where penitents stand, even the full-fledged righteous do not stand, as it is stated: "Peace, peace upon him who is far and him who is near." Peace and greeting is extended first to him who is far, the penitent, and only thereafter is peace extended to him who is near, the full-fledged righteous.

Yirmiyahu 3:22

"Return, faithless children." This implies that any wicked person, apostate, or the like, who repents, whether in an open, revealed manner or in private, will be accepted.

Vayikra 16:30 discussing Yom Kippur

For on this day atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins; you shall be clean before the LORD.

(Included in Yom Kippur davening)

"Teshuva (Return), Tefillah, (Prayer) and Tzedakah (Righteousness) avert the bad decree."

Pirkei Avot 4:17

He used to say: more precious is one hour in repentance and good deeds in this world, than all the life of the world to come; And more precious is one hour of the tranquillity of the world to come, than all the life of this world.

Mesechet Shabbat 153a

Rabbi Eliezer says: Repent one day before your death. Rabbi Eliezer's students asked him: But does a person know the day on which he will die? He said to them: All the more so this is a good piece of advice, and one should repent today lest he die tomorrow; and by following this advice one will spend his entire life in a state of repentance.