

THE YESHIVA PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM SHULCHAN ARUCH LEARNING  
PROJECT

# The Noahide Laws – Lesson Twenty Six

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# *Festivals I: Introduction & Rosh HaShanah*



## **Introduction: Torah Time**

The Torah establishes a spiritual calendar for the world. However, this calendar does not represent a single conception of time. Instead, the spiritual calendar is a complex affair of concentric, interlocking cycles.<sup>1</sup> For example, the Mishnah ([Rosh HaShanah 1:1](#)) tells us that there are several *Rosh Hashanah*'s (New Years), each demarcating a unique cycle of time. These cycles run concurrently, overlaying each other, creating an ever-shifting mosaic of seasons:

*There are four Rosh Hashanah's [New Years]: the 1<sup>st</sup> of Nissan is the New Year for kings and festivals, the 15<sup>th</sup> of Elul is the New Year for the tithing of animals (according to Rabbis Elazar and Shimon, this is on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Tishrei), the 1<sup>st</sup> of Tishrei for counting years, the Jubilee and Shemitta cycles, and the tithing of trees and produce. The 1<sup>st</sup> of Shvat is the New Year for trees according to the yeshiva [school] of Shammai. According to the yeshiva [school] of Hillel, it is on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Shvat.*

This flow of spiritual time is demarcated by a number of holy days that give it shape and meaning. For most of these holidays, their significance exists on two levels. One level is universal and important to all peoples. The other level is specific and narrowly applicable to Israel alone.

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<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew calendar acknowledges and integrates a number of astronomical cycles. Contrary to popular belief, the Hebrew calendar is not a lunar calendar. Rather, it is a [lunisolar calendar](#), a calendar based upon both the solar and lunar astronomical cycles. This resolution is necessary to keep the Torah's holidays within their designated seasons, as it is written: "These are festivals of the Lord that you shall proclaim in their appointed seasons." (Lev. 23:4). A purely lunar calendar results in an 11 day per-year drift in the holidays. This drift is the reason why the Islamic holidays, relying upon a purely lunar calendar, occur 11 days earlier each year. Furthermore, there is a larger solar cycle commemorated by [Birkas HaChamma](#) (a blessing on the renewal of the sun) every 28 years.

For example, let's look at the holiday of Sukkot. For Israel, it commemorates God's providence and guardianship of Israel via the *ananei ha-Kavod*, clouds of glory, which surrounded Israel as they traveled in the desert.<sup>2</sup>

The festival huts built on this holiday are in commemoration of these clouds.<sup>3</sup> We see that the *mitzvah* of building *sukkot*, huts, is of unique significance to Israel. This is true of many of the Torah's commandments pertaining to Sukkot.

However, Sukkot is also the holiday on which the world is judged for water.<sup>4</sup> This point is of universal significance; water is the life-blood of the world. It is fundamental to the survival of every living thing and to planetary ecology. The amount of rain and its geographic distribution is determined on this holiday. Some may be judged for drought, others for flood. However we pray that each nation and person will receive just the right amount.

Additionally, offerings were given on sukkot to atone for the nations of the world. While the Jews have *Yom Kippur*, the other nations of the world have sukkot.

For Noahides, these aspects of Sukkot are the most relevant. They transcend the specific observances of Israel, addressing common concerns for all of humanity and the world.

As we embark on our study of the Torah's holidays, our goal is to identify which holidays have universal significance, the nature of that significance, and how that significance may be positively expressed by Noahides.

## The Starting Point: *Mishnah, [Rosh HaShanah 1:2](#)*

*At four junctures, the world is judged: on Passover for grain, on Shavuot for fruits, on Rosh Hashanah all pass before him like sheep of the flock, as it is written, "He form their hearts as one, he understands all of their deeds." (Psalms 33). On Sukkot, the world is judged for water.*

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<sup>2</sup> Specifically, Sukkot commemorates the return of the Clouds of Glory. See *Kol Eliyahu* 84. The clouds departed after the sin of the golden calf. It was only after their national atonement and the building of the Tabernacle that the clouds returned. This was on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan. The specific observances of sukkot are mostly linked to this episode in the history of Israel.

<sup>3</sup> Bottom of [Sukkot 11b](#).

<sup>4</sup> *Mishnah, Rosh HaShanah 1:2*.

This Mishnah teaches us which of the Torah's holidays hold universal significance and are important for the entire world. It also tells us the main themes of these holidays.

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A BRIEF  
OVERVIEW OF  
THE MISHNAH

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***On Passover for grain...*** – On Passover God decides upon the volume and distribution of the world's grain production. While the liberation from Egypt, observance of the Passover sacrifices, the *Seder*, etc. are all uniquely Jewish concerns; the concern for worldwide food resources is universal. For Noahides, this is the central concern of the Passover holiday.

***On Shavuot for fruits...*** – On Shavuot the world is judged as to whether the fruit trees will yield enough produce to sustain the world's population. Shavuot is also the commemoration of the giving of the Torah at Sinai. For Noahides, the giving of the Torah holds special significance because it was then that the Noahide laws were reaffirmed by Moses. On Shavuot, the original Noahide covenant was placed under the umbrella of Sinaitic obligation. For Noahides, these are the two central themes of Shavuot: the reaffirmation of the Noahide laws and the judgment on the produce of trees.

***On Rosh HaShanah all pass before him like sheep of the flock...*** – All the peoples of the world are judged according to their deeds on Rosh HaShanah. This includes Noahides as well as Jews. While the blowing of the shofar is unique to the Jews, the general idea of repentance and judgment is important to all. As we shall see, many of the customs of Rosh HaShanah (meaning non-*mitzvah* practices) are reasonable and relevant for Noahides as well.

***On Sukkot, the world is judged for water...*** – The abundance and availability of fresh water (for drinking, rains, rivers, etc.) is determined on the holiday of Sukkot. Additionally, this was the holiday upon which offerings and prayers were given on behalf of the 70 gentile nations. Sukkot therefore has two meanings for Noahides: It is the day upon which Noahides pray for and acknowledge the importance of water, one of the creations of the First Day.<sup>5</sup> It is also the time of atonement for the nations of the world.

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<sup>5</sup> The creation narrative implies that water existed at the beginning of creation. However, the Midrash explains that it was impossible for anything to have existed prior to creation. The Midrash derives that ten things must have been created on the first day: the heavens and the earth, the *tohu* and *vohu* (void and primeval chaos), light and dark, wind and water, and the time of day and time of night (since the heavenly bodies were not yet created, day and night must have been defined as times instead of the products of planetary motion).

## Connecting to the Festivals

Noahides have no obligation to observe any of the Torah's festivals, even those that have universal relevance. Nevertheless, the importance of these festivals for the entire world compels their acknowledgement.

As we have mentioned many times in this course, Noahism has not existed as a living faith in over 1700 years. As a result, any customs, practices, or prayers unique to it have long since vanished. The goal of this project is not to attempt to recreate something that is long since lost, but to define the *halachic* (Torah practice) boundaries of Noahism and establish its parameters so that it can grow and flourish.

Much of what will be brought here are outlines of suggested customs and prayers for these holidays. The Noahide community will, undoubtedly and over time, develop their own liturgy and customs. Until then, these suggestions may serve as a springboard.

## One Day Vs. Two Days

Jews outside of Israel observe the Torah festivals for two days instead of one day (the exception, however, is Rosh HaShanah). An extra day was added to the holidays by the ancient sages due to a unique diaspora problem. At that time the new month was declared based upon the sighting and reporting of the new moon in Israel. Communicating the decree of the new month to the diaspora was fraught with problems. The issues involved often delayed the news of the new month from reaching diaspora settlements. At most, these delays could create a variance of one day in the diaspora calendar. Therefore, the ancient sages decreed that diaspora Jews should add an additional day to alleviate the calendrical doubt.

Nowadays, with our fixed calendar, there is no practical need for a second day. Nevertheless, the Jewish community still keeps this additional day because the original decree that established it was never abolished.

It is not known if the ancient Noahide communities observed or acknowledged the Torah festivals in any way. This fact, combined with the lack of continuity in the transmission of Noahism and the voluntary nature of Noahide observance, makes it clear that the rabbinic decree of a second day is not relevant to Noahides.

Furthermore, by keeping only the Biblically ordained date of the holiday (as do the Jews in Israel), Noahides are making a positive distinction as to their unique relationship to the holidays.

## Rosh HaShanah: Introduction

*...on Rosh Hashanah all pass before him like sheep of the flock, as it is written, “He forms their hearts as one, he understands all of their deeds.”*

*...on Rosh Hashanah all pass before him like sheep of the flock,*

Rashi comments on this Mishnah in Rosh HaShanah 18a. He explains that when a shepherd counts his sheep for tithes, he lets them pass one-by-one through a small opening into a corral. The opening, being too small for two sheep to pass at once, ensures that they can be counted properly as they pass through. It also gives the shepherd a chance to examine each sheep individually. According to this explanation, each person is responsible for his own judgment; it is between him and his “shepherd.” Furthermore, Rosh Hashanah is a passage through a “narrow place.” It is a day upon which all things hang in the balance. However,

*“He forms their hearts as one, he understands all of their deeds.”*

This verse is surprising, because it appears to contradict what we just learned! If Rosh HaShanah is a time of individual judgment, then why does this verse imply that it is a time of communal judgment? The Talmud explains that this verse means that on Rosh HaShanah God also sees the hearts of all mankind in a single glance.

The correct way to read this Mishnah, then, is that it is teaching us two things. One is that Rosh Hashanah is the time when one must face his creator as an individual, taking sole responsibility for his actions and being. The other, is that on Rosh Hashanah mankind and all its deeds is viewed as a whole. On Rosh Hashanah, God judges human society in all of its complexity and the vast network of interpersonal relationships therein.

## The New Year?

As we mentioned above, spiritual time is a complicated motion of wheels-within-wheels. The Mishnah tells us that there are a number of years running concurrently, each with their own Rosh HaShanah:

*There are four Rosh Hashanah's [New Years]: the 1<sup>st</sup> of Nissan is the New Year for kings and festivals, the 15<sup>th</sup> of Elul is the New Year for the tithing of animals (according to Rabbis Elazar and Shimon, this is on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Tishrei), the 1<sup>st</sup> of Tishrei for counting years, the Jubilee and Shemitta cycles, and the tithing of trees and produce.*

*The 1<sup>st</sup> of Shvat is the New Year for trees according to the yeshiva [school] of Shammai.  
According to the yeshiva [school] of Hillel, it is on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Shvat.*

The Rosh HaShanah of the 1<sup>st</sup> of Tishrei is the BIG Rosh HaShanah. This is the Rosh HaShanah that determines how we actually count our years. However, the month of Tishrei is not the first month. The first month is actually Nissan.

It seems counter-intuitive to count years starting in the middle of the cycle of months. However, it makes sense when you think of the “year” as a number of years occurring at the same time. The first day of the first month, the month of Nissan, is the Rosh HaShanah for kings and festivals. This year deals with counting the reign of kings, dating of legal documents, and the cycle of festival offerings in the temple.

The BIG Rosh HaShanah, however, is concerned with the spiritual relationship between man and his creator. While months are counted according to the civil calendar, the BIG picture – years – is determined according to the spiritual cycle.

This point is reinforced by a fascinating dispute in the Talmud [Rosh HaShanah 10b – 11a](#):

- Rabbi Eliezer offers evidence to prove that creation occurred in Tishrei (the seventh month).
- Rabbi Yehoshua offers evidence that creation happened in Nissan (the first month).

Rabbeinu Tam<sup>6</sup> points out that they are not actually arguing. There were actually two creations. The first, in Tishrei, was the creation of the world in thought. This was the purer, spiritual, creation of the world in abstract. The creation of Nissan, however, was the physical creation of the world. The *Mases Binyamin* notes<sup>7</sup> that this explains many differences between the year that begins in Nissan and the year that begins in Tishrei.

We count years according to the very beginning of God’s thought: Tishrei. In doing so, we assign greater importance to the abstract, prime spiritual creation rather than the physical creation of Nissan.

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<sup>6</sup> Tosafos Rosh HaShanah 27a.

<sup>7</sup> In Shu”t 101. He points out that we calculate years based on the assumption that the world was created in Tishrei. However, many other astronomical calculations are based on the assumption that the world was created in Nissan.



## Rosh Hashanah: a Day of Many Meanings

When Rabbi Eliezer tells us that the creation occurred in Tishrei, he means that the creation was completed in Tishrei on the first day of the month. The creation actually began on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of Elul, culminating with the creation of Adam on the final sixth day of creation.

Rosh Hashanah is, more properly, the birthday of Adam and the anniversary of the creation of man. However, the joy of this event is dampened by the fact that it is also the anniversary of Adam and Eve's fall.

Because Rosh HaShanah commemorates two events of opposing natures, it is a holiday full of paradoxical meanings. It is a day of celebration, yet also of judgment and trepidation. It is a day of joy, yet solemnity. It is also a time of great mercy, as well as great severity.

The preparation, prayers, and customs of Rosh Hashanah all acknowledge this subtle weave of meanings.

Rosh Hashanah is ultimately a time of renewal. It is the day when each person must search his deeds, evaluating his relationships both with God and his fellow men, righting wrongs and starting anew.

## Elul – A Month of Preparation

Preparations for Rosh Hashanah actually begin a month before the holiday, starting on the first of Elul. Since ancient times, the month of Elul has been a time of introspection and review. It was on the first of this month that Moses ascended Sinai to beseech forgiveness for the Jewish people. It is also during this month that creation began.

Starting on the first of Elul, every person should devote time daily to consider his relationship with God, his neighbors, and his family. A person should assess who he is now, who he wants to be, and how to attain these goals.

Our goal in the month of Elul is change; we set out to change who we are, to show God that we can be different, better people. In English, this process is called repentance. In Hebrew the term is *teshuvah*.

## ***Teshuvah*: Technical vs. Colloquial Use**

Colloquially, the term *teshuvah* is employed to mean any type of repentance. However, *Teshuva* also has very specific, technical meanings. In the course of your studies you may come across the statement: “There is no *teshuvah* for Non-Jews,<sup>8</sup>” or “There is no *teshuvah* for Noahides.” When you see this statement, remember that it is dealing with the technical definition of *teshuvah*, which is far more complicated than the way the word is commonly used. The technical definition of *teshuvah* is only relevant to Jews. However, there are other types of repentance. For example, many explain that the type of repentance relevant to Noahides is called *charata*. The details of these technical distinctions, however, are entirely theoretical and have little-to-no practical impact on Noahide practice. There is certainly repentance for Noahides regardless of whether the technical term for that repentance is *teshuvah*, *charata*, or anything else. After all, the story of Jonah is all about non-Jewish repentance.<sup>9</sup>

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**ACTION:**

**PSALM 27**

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The custom of Jews, starting on the first day of Elul, is to recite Psalm 27 daily, both in the morning and evening (around sunset or at night). The Midrash explains that this psalm contains a number of subtle references to the period of repentance and the holidays. It is certainly appropriate for Noahides to recite this psalm as part of their preparations for Rosh Hashanah. This twice-daily recitation of Psalm 27 continues from the 1<sup>st</sup> of Elul through the 21<sup>st</sup> of Tishrei.<sup>10</sup>

### **Psalm 27**

*To be recited in the morning and at sunset (or at night), daily, from the 1<sup>st</sup> of Elul to the 21<sup>st</sup> of Tishrei. Commentary is found in the footnotes.*

Of David: the Lord is my light<sup>11</sup> and my salvation.<sup>12</sup> Of whom shall I be afraid? The Lord is the strength of my life. Of whom shall I dread? When evil-doers – my

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<sup>8</sup> See [Midrash Tanchuma](#), *Haazinu* 4.

<sup>9</sup> Resolving *Midrash Tanchumab* against *Sefer Yonah* has elicited much discussion among the Acharonim. See *Sefer Ratz KeTzvi: Yerach HaEisanim* 13 for an extensive discussion of the issues.

<sup>10</sup> This, as we shall see, is the period of the holidays for Noahides and Jews.

<sup>11</sup> The Midrash understands this as a reference to Rosh Hashanah.

<sup>12</sup> The salvation mentioned here is the atonement of the holiday season. For Jews it refers to the atonement of Yom Kippur, for Noahides the atonement of Sukkot.

tormentors and opponents<sup>13</sup> – draw near to devour my flesh, it is they who stumble and fall. Though an army may besiege me, my heart will not fear. Should warfare arise against me, in this alone I shall trust.<sup>14</sup>

I have asked one thing of the Lord, only this have I sought: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the pleasantness of the Lord, and to meditate within His sanctuary.<sup>15</sup>

On the day of evil He will hide me within His shelter. He will conceal me in the innermost shelter of his tent. He will lift me up upon a rock. And now he will raise my head above my foes who surround me. I will slaughter in his tent joyous offerings. I will sing and make music to the Lord. Lord, hear my voice when I call! Favor me and answer me! For your sake has my heart spoke to me: “Seek his presence!” O God, I seek your presence! Do not conceal your countenance from me! Do not repel your servant in anger! You have been my help. Do not forsake me, do not abandon me, O God of my salvation!

Though my father and mother have abandoned me,<sup>16</sup> the Lord shall gather me in. Teach me your way, O Lord, and on account of my watchful foes<sup>17</sup> set me upon a straight path. Do not give me over to their wishes for they have set against me false witnesses who breathe violence.

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<sup>13</sup> The evil-doers and opponents mentioned in this psalm are primarily internal. They are the devices of the *yetzer ha-ra*, the evil inclination. They are also the memories and emotions associated with one’s past misdeeds. These memories often torment a person and hamper their ability to return to God. This will be discussed more in a future lesson.

<sup>14</sup> [Rashi](#) and [Radak](#) explain that this refers to the opening line “The Lord is my light and my salvation,” which is the process of Rosh HaShanah and subsequent atonement. One must trust in this process. Once a person has returned to God and reestablished a positive relationship with God, then God will protect and shelter him. Alternatively, [Ibn Ezra](#) explains that this phrase refers to the next sentence: *I have asked one thing of the Lord, only this have I sought: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life...* One should trust in God because he (the penitent) ultimately desires spiritual success and not the vain achievements of this world.

<sup>15</sup> Writes the [Malbim](#), that despite the many desires and needs a person may have, the desire to know his creator is the ultimate, all inclusive desire of the soul.

<sup>16</sup> [Sforno](#) explains that once a person becomes an adult he must find his own way in the world. He can no longer rely upon his parents to make choices for him. He must choose his values and make his own decisions. Although his parents are no longer his guiding voice, the Lord is always there. God is eternally our father and guide.

<sup>17</sup> The Hebrew here is a little difficult to translate. The word for “Watchful foes” is related to the word for “staring” or “gazing.” In the context of our verse, it refers to those who stare maliciously. The psalm is asking God to frustrate the wishes of those who maliciously watch and mock one who wishes to come back to God. See [Radak](#).

Had I not believed<sup>18</sup> that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of life!<sup>19</sup>  
Hope to the Lord! Be strong and He will give you courage<sup>20</sup> – and hope to the Lord!

## Studying For Elul: Works on Repentance

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**ACTION:  
STUDY FOR  
ELUL**

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In Elul, many prepare by studying works of *mussar* (personal development) or writings on *Teshuva* (repentance). There are, thank God, many, many books addressing these topics. The following are a few suggested titles:

- [\*Returnity\*](#), by R' Tal Zwecker
- [\*The Power of Teshuvah\*](#), by R' Heshy Kleinman
- [\*A Touch of Purity\*](#), by R' Yechiel Spero
- [\*Teshuvah, Restoring Life\*](#), by R' Reuven Leuchter
- [\*Teshuvah\*](#), by S. Felbrand
- [\*Thirty Days to Teshuva\*](#), by R' Zvi Miller
- [\*Crown Him With Joy\*](#), by R' Hadar Margolin
- [\*Gates of Repentance\*](#), by Rabbeinu Yonah

During Elul, many are accustomed to study and use the advice given by [Rabbeinu Yonah](#) in his *Gates of Repentance*, in a section called *The Foundation of Repentance* (the full text of *Gates of Repentance* is available in translation from Feldheim Publishers.) We have provided a translation of this section here:

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<sup>18</sup> Rashi explains: Were it not for my faith in God, my enemies would have destroyed me and I would have never merited to achieve closeness to God.

<sup>19</sup> Meaning the World to Come. See *Brachos* 4a.

<sup>20</sup> Strength in faith is the ultimate source of all courage.

## Gate of Repentance: The Foundation of Repentance by Rabbeinu Yonah of Gerona c. 1250 CE

The Holy One, blessed is He, taught us through his servants, the prophets, and [specifically] through Yechezkel the prophet [Yechezkel 18:30-31]:

*Repent, and cause others to repent, from all your transgressions so that they shall not be a stumbling block of iniquity for you. Cast away from yourselves all your transgressions and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die?*

You, who have transgressed and sinned, and now comes to seek refuge under the wings of the Divine Presence, to enter into the ways of repentance, I shall instruct you and enlighten you in the path to travel.

On that day,<sup>21</sup> you shall cast away all the sins that you have committed and consider yourself as if you were born today; as if you have neither merit nor fault. This day is the beginning of your deeds. Starting today, you shall weigh all your actions in order that your steps not veer from the good path. This path will bring you to repentance, a complete return, because it is as if you have cast from your shoulders the heaviness of all the transgressions you have committed. Thus your thoughts will neither haunt nor confuse you nor prevent you from repenting because of embarrassment from your sins. This is because [otherwise] your thoughts will say to you: “How could I be so brazen to repent after I have sinned and transgressed, doing such-and-such over and over? How could I raise my face before Him? [I am] like a thief who has been caught - I am too embarrassed to stand before Him! And how can I show myself in his courtyard, how could I keep his laws?”

Do not think like this! The evil inclination sits like a fly in the chambers of the heart, renewing himself every day, watching and waiting to make you stumble. He puts these destructive thoughts in your heart. Instead, you should remember that this is the nature of the Creator, may He be blessed: that His hand is outstretched to receive the penitent. Therefore, it is good for you to cast off your sins and make for yourself a new heart.

And so shall you do on the day that you decide to return: When your spirit moves you to become a servant of your Creator, you shall offer up your prayer before Him and say:

“Please God, I have sinned and transgressed, (and such and such I did...) from the day I came upon the Earth until this very day. And now, my heart has moved me and my spirit has pressed me to return to You in

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<sup>21</sup> Meaning the day one decides to return to God.

truth and with a good and complete heart – with all my heart, soul, and all that is dear to me – and to admit and cast aside my ways; to cast away from myself all my sins and to make for myself a new heart and a new spirit, and to be meticulous and careful in my fear of You. And You, Lord, my God, who opens His hand with repentance, helping those who come to purify themselves, open Your hand and receive me with complete repentance before You. Help me to strengthen myself in fear of You. Help me against the evil inclination, who wages war against me with cunning strategies, seeking to entrap my soul and destroy men, that it should not rule over me. Distance it from my 248 limbs and cast it into the depths of the sea. Thwart it so that it shall not stand at my right side to accuse me.<sup>22</sup> Help me so that I shall go in Your laws. Remove from me this heart of stone and grant me a heart of flesh.

Please O Lord, my God, listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplications and receive my return unto You. Do not let any sin prevent my prayer and return. May there come before Your holy throne upright defenders to defend me and bring my prayer before You. And if, on account of my many and great sins, there is no one to defend me, then make an opening from under Your throne of glory and receive my repentance so that I should not return empty from before You; for only you listen to prayer.”

You should habituate yourself to always say this prayer.

And such is the path that you should walk and the actions to which you should accustom yourself so that you will be on guard from all sin. In the morning, when you wake from your sleep, you should think in your mind that you will repent and examine your ways. You should strive, in accordance with your ability, not to stray.

At meal-times, before you eat, you should confess your sins. If you strayed in anything, you should confess it. This confession will distance you from all sin and transgression. Because, if a sin comes your way, you will be cautious of it and say in your heart: “How could I do this great, evil thing and then confess on it later? Why, I would be of those of which it is said, [*Tehillim* 78:36] 'Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.' I would be like one who immerses [in a *mikveh*] while holding an impure creature! I would be foolish and with little intellect before my Creator for not having being able to stand up to my lusts even for a short time like this!”

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<sup>22</sup> One’s own evil inclination stands against Him as prosecutor.

And when you put this to your heart and spirit, you will then be guarded from sin.

You should be swift as a deer and strong as a lion to do the will of your father in heaven. This applies even to minor things because all your ways will be measured. And so King David said [*Tehillim* 49:6]:

*Why should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about.*

This verse speaks of the sins and *mitzvos* that men trample with their heels (meaning sins that most people are not careful about) and consider them to be nothing.

When the time to eat comes, and you search yourself and find nothing, then you should thank and praise the Creator who has helped you against your enemies, and that you merited to have one hour of *teshuva* in this world. Like this you should then eat your meal. Afterwards, when the evening meal comes, you should confess beforehand everything, as I have said. And so you should do from the time of eating your evening meal until the time to sleep [meaning, a third confession before sleep].

We have, therefore, three daily opportunities for this confession. Thus should you do every day from the first day of your *teshuva* and afterwards, for one month or one year, until you are strengthened in the fear of the Creator and have succeeded in abandoning your bad habits.

And when you can guard yourself from the sins to which you were habituated, finding that you had many opportunities to transgress yet did not do so, you should no longer fear. From heaven you were helped... And regarding the previous sins that you had cast off from yourself, you should be always regretful and seek from God to erase them from the heavenly record. You should also chastise your soul over them. If you are of delicate constitution, and cannot tolerate difficult chastisement and fasts, you should at least restrict your desires, in particular those for food and drink.

So said said the pious Rabbi Avraham bar Dovid, “the best safeguard, the greatest and best, is to refrain from over-indulging in food.” He explained his words, saying that this is not to mean that one should refrain altogether from eating meat and drinking wine. After all, what has already been forbidden is enough. Rather, he means that while you are eating and still desire to eat more, you should stop in honor of your Creator, and not eat according to your whole desire. This practice will save you from sin and remind you of the love of the Creator more than fasting once a week. That is because this practice is every day, always, when you eat or drinks – then you should refrain from your desire for the honor of your Creator.

You should put your heart to the Torah. If you were accustomed to learning one page each day, then you should learn two. This is because Torah study leads to action. And you should subjugate yourself, forcing your innate desires to be for Torah and the fulfillment of *mitzvos*...

You should not be haphazard in your service of the Creator. Rather you should serve Him with a complete heart. You should never neglect any matter because of laziness or embarrassment...

Even if the world mocks you, nevertheless you should be like a simpleton in their eyes rather than transgress even a small *mitzva* of the Creator's *mitzvos*. Regarding this it is written "in its love you shall be ravished always" (Mishlei 5:19), which means - for the love of a *mitzva*, you should be ravished and simple to leave all things and to work on it. We have found an example of this by Rebbi Elazar ben Peda, who would sit in the lower market of Tzipori and toil in Torah while his cloak lay in the upper market of the town. He appeared like a simpleton in the eyes of the world because of his love of *mitzvos* and of the Creator [Talmud *Eruvin* 54b]. And if one does this and dies at half of his days, he is given reward as if he had lived all 70 years. This is what King Shlomo said in his wisdom [*Kobeh* 5:11]:

*The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much.*

This means that whether one's days are many or few, the reward for the few is like the reward for the many.

Moshe toiled for the Jewish people 40 years, and Shmuel HaNavi only ten years, nevertheless the verse equates both of them as one, as it is written [*Tehillim* 99:6]:

*Moshe and Aaron among his priests, and Shmuel among them that call upon his name.*

The penitent should not muse to himself and say: "Why should I toil in vain? I will waste my strength for nothing! How can my repentance stand against my sins? All that I am capable of doing will not help against all the sins that I have done!"

Don't say this. The Holy One, blessed is He, promised through the prophet Yechezkel that one's sins will not be recalled again, as it is written [*Yechezkel* 18:21-22]:

*But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he has committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he has committed, they shall not be mentioned to him; in his righteousness that he has done he shall live.*

And there are many more verses for those haunted by their sins, to strengthen



them to repent as is written [*Yechezkel* 33:10-11]:

*Say to them, By My life, says the L-rd, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live. Repent, repent from your evil ways; why should you die, O children of Israel?*

And through all his servants, the prophets, He warned us many times on the matter of *teshuva*. And also our teachers, the Sages of the generations, warned us very much on *teshuva* saying “repent one day before your death” [*Pirkei Avot*].

And they said, “the level of the one who has repented is greater than that of the completely righteous.” This is what they meant when they said “in the place where the penitent stands, the perfectly righteous does not stand” [Repentance] is one of the things created before the creation of the world. Likewise they said in the *Midrash Bereishis* [4:13] “*And Kayin said to God, 'is my sin too great to bear?' - he repented.*”

Therefore this verse has 7 words, (hinting) that repentance rises up until the holy throne, the 7 firmaments, 7 realms...

Therefore, every God fearing person should put in his heart the fear of the Creator and repent from all his sins. He should prepare for himself a new, clean, pure heart with which to serve his Creator. He should accustom himself to all that has been written. He should use his intelligence to think of ways in which he could fear the Lord, the Great and Awesome One, and engage such matters between him privately, away from the eyes of men.

Fortunate is one who merits and causes others to merit. The entire world was created for such a person, as it is written [*Koheles* 12:13]:

*The end of the matter, all having been heard, is fear God and keep his mitzvos, for this is the sum of man.*”

Our sages have expounded this verse to mean [Talmud *Berachos* 6] “The entire world was created as a companion for such a person.”