

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 19

Iggeres Hateshuva, Sicha 2

The Tanya:

In the fourth chapter of Iggeres Hateshuva, the Alter Rebbe begins to explain the fundamentals of repentance according to Kabbalah and chassidus. He opens this discussion as follows:

“But the beginning of the mitzvah of teshuvah and its core, is a true and wholehearted return to G-d. This must now be explained thoroughly and comprehensively. Let us begin with the Zohar’s mystical interpretation of teshuvah: “[The Hebrew word teshuva can be divided into] tashuv hey (‘the hey of G-d’s four-letter name shall return’); [the reconnection of] the second hey [to the preceding letter vav] is lower-level teshuvah; [the reconnection of] the first hey [to the preceding letter yud] is higher-level teshuvah.”

The Notes:

In his commentary on the Tanya, the Rebbe’s father dwells on the introductory phrase of the Alter Rebbe, “This must now be explained thoroughly and comprehensively.” These two clauses allude to the two levels of teshuva under discussion. “Explained thoroughly” corresponds with the “lower-level teshuvah;” more specifically, with the two levels within that form of repentance, a) the base level of repentance, b) the “master” of the lower level of repentance. “And comprehensively” corresponds to the “higher-level teshuvah.”

The Questions:

1. The higher-level teshuvah also has two distinctions, the higher repentance itself, which corresponds with the first hei in the Divine name, and the “master” of the repentance, which corresponds with the first letter of the Divine name, the infinitesimal yud. Why does the Alter Rebbe allude to both elements within the lower teshuva but

only the base level of the higher teshuvah?

2. This preface is meant to give comprehensive understanding to the “beginning of the mitzvah of teshuvah and its core,” which, as the Alter Rebbe wrote earlier, is the abandoning of sin in one’s heart and resolving to return to G-d. How is the mystical explanation offered here, on the effects of teshuva on the Divine name, relevant to the basic definition of teshuva? Furthermore, the higher-level of teshuvah outlined here is a lofty level of closeness with G-d achieved in the aftermath of true repentance. How is understanding the higher level of teshuvah important for the “beginning of teshuvah and its core”?

The Explanation:

There are four levels of teshuva enumerated here, each a deeper form of abandoning the ego and connecting with G-d:

1. The lower-level teshuva: “turning away from sin,” this is the decision to cease committing transgressions. This requires a basic check on one’s own ego, denying it the fulfillment of its desires.
2. The “master” of the lower-level teshuva: “doing good,” this refers to making an effort beyond one’s natural capacities to perform mitzvos and study Torah.
3. The higher level teshuvah: “studying Torah,” this refers to a state of consciousness where a person is only a

channel for the Divine word and does not possess any sense of self.

4. The “master” of the higher level teshuva: “sanctifying oneself with what is permitted to them,” this refers to a state of consciousness where every action a person does is suffused with divine intention and is totally absent of personal motivations and desires. This is alluded to in the letter yud of the Divine name, for the yud cannot be defined, just as this commitment cannot be defined but is rather expressed within every sphere of human action.

Now, when a person commits even a minor transgression, it reveals the internal damage he has in every “letter of the Divine name,” meaning, in every level of commitment. If his “yud” was intact and he was suffused with Divine awareness that affected every action, then he would not have committed that minor sin. Therefore, in the very beginning of the process of repentance, we must understand the entire span of potential commitment, for the highest level of connection must inform the basic level of repentance, the first move of turning away from sin.

This also explains why the Alter Rebbe alludes to all three levels of connection, avoiding evil, doing good, learning Torah, but not the highest level of Divine awareness. Because that highest level cannot be defined, instead, it is apparent and expressed within every other realm of human activity.