

פוקח עורים

מאת כ"ק אדמו"ר דובער נבג"מ זי"ע

OPENING THE EYES OF THE BLIND

Pokeyach Ivrim

A Practical Guide for the Baal Teshuvah

By

Our Master, Teacher, and Rebbe

Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch

The Mittler Rebbe

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Rabbi Yosef the Teamster of Beshenkovitch And The Baal Teshuvah

The previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, The Holy Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch, wrote that the book *Pokayach Ivrim*—“He Who Opens the Eyes of the Blind,” was most likely written for the benefit of a specific *Baal Teshuvah*-Returnee to Torah practice. In one of the entrees to his diary, the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe recorded the account of this particular *Baal Teshuvah*. The following story is a translation from the Rebbe’s diary.

By

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn
The sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe

Part One

Rabbi Yosef becomes a Chasid of the Alter Rebbe

“His Honorable Holiness, my father, master, teacher and rabbi (The Holy Rabbi Shalom Dovber of Lubavitch), told me to call upon Rabbi Abba Zelig and to ask him to relate his father’s biography to me. His father was the *Chassid*, Rabbi Yosef the Teamster of Beshenkovich.

When I asked Rabbi Abba Zelig to tell me about his father, he requested that I first review a Chassidic discourse with him. Afterwards he told me his father’s story, as follows:

There was a certain man in Beshenkovitch by the name of Rabbi Ephraim Zalman who was famed as a Torah scholar in all the surrounding areas, and who corresponded in matters of Torah law with many of the great Torah luminaries of that generation. When the Alter Rebbe’s fame as a tremendous Torah scholar spread far and wide, Rabbi Ephraim Zalman traveled especially to Vitebsk to test the *Ilu*y of Lioznia (The Wunderkind of Lioznia), as the Alter Rebbe was called in Vitebsk during his first year of marriage. At the time he was fourteen years old.

Rabbi Ephraim Zalman spent approximately two weeks at the home of the Alter Rebbe’s wealthy father-in-law, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Segal, at which time he delighted in many Torah conversations with the Alter Rebbe. He was extremely impressed and astonished by the young man’s incredible

talents and expansive knowledge in all fields of Torah, and his astounding depth of understanding and tremendous sharpness of mind.

When he returned home, he became very despondent, for he had seen with his own eyes and had confirmed to himself that though the *Iluy* of Lioznia was only a young lad of fourteen, he nevertheless was his superior in both sharpness of mind and depth of Torah knowledge.

Rabbi Ephraim Zalman was so shaken by this that for a month he had difficulty focusing on his Torah studies and learning for extended periods of time, as he was used to. Finally, he poured out his heart to the elder *Gaon*, Rabbi Avraham Ze'ev, Saggi-Nahor (The Blind). Rabbi Avraham comforted him by telling him that in *Bekius* (committing great portions of the vast teachings of Torah to memory) he was second only to The *Gaon* of Vilna. Only then was Rabbi Ephraim Zalman's spirit revived, and he returned to his studies as before.

The *Gaon*, Rabbi Avraham Ze'ev, Saggi-Nahor was fluent in the entire Talmud with the commentary of Rashi and Tosafot, all of which he knew by heart. He also served as *Rosh Yeshiva* (Chief Rabbi of a Rabbinical Academy) for fifty years and had many students who were outstanding Torah scholars.

One of Rabbi Avraham Ze'ev's greatest students was Rabbi Yosef. Besides his great talents in Torah learning, even as a child Rabbi Yosef had a natural fear of G-d. When he was eighteen years old he married the daughter of a certain villager who lived in a settlement within the environs of the city of

Beshenkovitch. He dwelt there for approximately fifteen years occupying himself in the study of Torah and Divine service.

Now, it once happened that a certain traveler, who turned out to be a great Torah scholar, stayed in their settlement. Rabbi Yosef was overjoyed with the guest and delighted in the many Torah conversations he had with him. Since it was the winter month of *Cheshvan* and because of the heavy rains travel on the roads was very difficult, Rabbi Yosef impressed it upon his guest to stay longer until the rains had subsided.

In one of their conversations Rabbi Yosef heard from his guest that he had received most of his Torah insights from the *Maggid* of Lioznia (The Preacher of Lioznia-This was the title that the Alter Rebbe was called by at the time). These words penetrated his heart and he resolved that next time he goes to town he will inquire as to the whereabouts of the city of Lioznia. He intended to go there to meet the *Maggid* and to personally hear Torah insights from him.

However, three years passed and Rabbi Yosef still had not gone to visit the *Maggid* of Lioznia. It once happened, however, that he attended a gathering of Torah scholars in which the *Gaon*, Rabbi Ephraim Zalman lectured on a very difficult section of the Talmud. In the course of his speech, Rabbi Ephraim Zalman mentioned that fourteen years previously (in the year 1763) he had met the *Ilyu* of Lioznia (The Wunderkind of Lioznia) when he was still residing at the home of Rabbi Yehudah Leib Segal, his father-in-law. He mentioned that while there he delighted in many Torah

conversations with him and that the *Ily* had explained several comments of the *Raavad* on the *Mishneh Torah* of the *Rambam* (Maimonides). Since the sages stated that whoever quotes a teaching in the name of the person he heard it from brings redemption to the world, Rabbi Ephraim Zalman related some of the teachings he heard from the Alter Rebbe and explained the tremendous depth of insight and sharpness of intellect in these teachings.

These words penetrated Rabbi Yosef's heart, and he resolved to visit the Alter Rebbe in Lioznia without delay. This was in the summer 1777. Rabbi Yosef stayed in Lioznia for a year. He then returned home and immersed himself in the study of Torah and Divine service according to the instructions of the Alter Rebbe. Twenty years passed in this manner, during which time Rabbi Yosef would travel to visit the Alter Rebbe every two or three years.

In the year 1801 Rabbi Yosef became a widower. During the first year after his wife's passing he continued to live on his father-in-law's estate, which by then had been inherited by his brothers-in-law. He then left the estate, against his brothers-in-law's wishes, and rented a room in the city of Beshenkovitch. His landlord was a certain Yochanan Nafcha (The Blacksmith).

Around this time Rabbi Yehudah, his brother-in-law, took him to Rabbinical court in order to force him to accept the five hundred guldens that his father-in-law had left him in his will. The verdict was in the affirmative and Rabbi Yosef was obligated to accept the funds. After giving one tenth of

the amount to various charities, he lent three hundred gulden to the free loan society and he deposited the remaining one hundred and fifty gulden with a committee of three wealthy men of the city. It was their responsibility to pay for his living expenses with these remaining funds. When the funds were depleted Rabbi Yosef sustained himself by teaching three students. He ate in the homes of their parents using a rotation system of two months in each home.

Rabbi Yosef visited the city of Liadi (where the Alter Rebbe now resided) in the year 5564 1804. When he entered the Alter Rebbe's study for a private audience, the Rebbe asked him if he knew the six orders of the *Mishnah* perfectly by heart. Rabbi Yosef answered in the affirmative and that, amongst other things, he was accustomed to reviewing the entire six orders of the *Mishnah* once a month.

The Alter Rebbe answered, "*Mishnah* has the same letters as *Neshamah*-Soul. You will marry a woman who has children from a previous marriage. She will give birth to a son for you. HaShem, Blessed be He, will give you long life. For the good of your soul, it is better for you to be a teamster (a wagon driver) than to take a rabbinical post."

Part Two

Rabbi Yosef becomes a Teamster

When he returned home he was approached with the proposition to marry the daughter of Rabbi Nesanel Soifer (The Scribe), who had been widowed. She was young and owned and operated a grocery store. In the summer of 1808, she gave birth to a son whom they called Abba Zelig.

In the year 1814 representatives from the city of Leiplie came to Rabbi Yosef with a written request from the community of Leiplie offering him the position of Chief Rabbi of Leiplie. At this, Rabbi Yosef remembered that ten years earlier the Alter Rebbe, who had passed away in 1812, had told him that for the good of his soul it would be better for him to be a teamster rather than to take a rabbinical post. He therefore refused the offer and sent away the representatives of Leiplie empty handed.

After they left, upon contemplating the Alter Rebbe's words, Rabbi Yosef came to the realization that now that a rabbinical post had been offered him, the time had come that he must become a teamster. For a full month he struggled with his conscience about what to do about the matter. One moment he would decide to go ahead with it and become a teamster and the next moment he would hesitate and decide the opposite. Thus he went, back and forth, in a state of complete confusion, distress and indecision.

Finally, deciding to become a teamster, he went to a certain inn which was often frequented by teamsters, in order to make their acquaintance and learn their trade. When the teamsters saw Rabbi Yosef approaching them, they greeted him and asked him where he wished to travel. Did he want to go to Vitebsk or to Leiplie? (These were the two largest cities in the area.) Rabbi Yosef answered timidly that he did not wish to travel anywhere. He only wished to learn the skills of a teamster. The teamsters looked at each other with incredulity. They simply could not comprehend what he was saying.

“Rabbi”, one of his students who happened to be there, said to him, “You have a greater understanding in the laws of koshering vessels (Hagala), than in the laws of how to be a teamster (Agala). Those teamsters who had some Torah knowledge and could distinguish between hagala and agala began to laugh. However, one of the teamsters said in all seriousness, “If Rabbi Yosef the Teacher came to us, he obviously did not come to joke with us. This must be important to him.” He turned to Rabbi Yosef and said to him, “I am willing, Rabbi. Come with me and I will explain all your questions.”

Rabbi Yosef immediately went to the stable where all the horses were housed. The teamster showed him how to harness the horses to the wagon, how to use the reins and how to grease the axles etc. Not knowing how to take care, Rabbi Yosef became filthy with grease and one of the horses slapped him with its tail and nearly hit him in the eye.

Rabbi Yosef returned home filthy and exhausted, broken in spirit and in body. He changed into clean clothes and went to synagogue to pray the afternoon services and to teach Torah to the congregants. After the evening prayers his friends and acquaintances asked him, “Why did you visit the Teamsters guild? They say you went with Yitzchak the Teamster to learn how to harness the horses.” Rabbi Yosef avoided their questions and quickly went home.

When he arrived home he found his wife sitting and crying. He understood that most likely the news of his visit to Yitzchak the Teamster’s stable had reached her. He went to his room, wept bitterly and asked himself, “Have I invested over fifty years of my life to constant Torah study and Divine service just to end up as a wagon driver? Will a seventy year old man now become a wagon driver?” He decided that, come what may, he will not become a teamster.

However, even before he calmed down, he remembered how he had stood ten years earlier in the presence of his master, teacher and rabbi, the Alter Rebbe. The holy words of the Rebbe still reverberated in his ears. He realized that all the Rebbe’s words had fully come to pass and that certainly now the time had come for him to become a teamster.

Suddenly, the idea to fulfill the advice of our holy sages entered his heart. He would tell his wife everything and do whatever she said. He immediately went to the other room where his wife was. She was leaning over the rail of the crib where their little child Abba Zelig lay. Tears rolled down her

cheeks at the terrible news that her husband had suddenly gone mad and had asked the teamsters to teach him their trade. When she saw her husband approaching she wiped her tears and tried to show a pleasant face.

“I have something to tell you”, Rabbi Yosef said. He related everything that the Alter Rebbe had told him. Concluding his words, he said, “Now, I don’t know what to do. Is it possible that after fifty years of sitting and studying Torah and serving G-d, I shall become a wagon driver? On the other hand, how could I not fulfill the words of our holy Rebbe, of blessed memory, whose soul reposes in Eden?” When he concluded, he added that he awaits her decision. “I will do whatever you decide.”

“My opinion”, his wife answered, “Is that if this is what your master and teacher told you, then you must fulfill his words immediately, without delaying even for a day. Tomorrow I will sell my pearl necklace and my two jackets embroidered in gold. That should bring in sufficient funds for you to buy a horse and wagon. May you begin this trade, according to the advice of our Rebbe, in a good and propitious time!”

When Rabbi Yosef heard his wife’s words, spoken with such a pure heart and such pure faith, on the one hand, he was very impressed and happy at her pure faith in the Tzaddikim. However, on the other hand, his heart broke within him when he considered that now he, Rabbi Yosef, will be a wagon driver. He, “Rabbi Yosef the Understanding”, as the learned men of the city called him, “Rabbi Yosef the

Provider of Sustenance”, as he was called in all the surrounding towns and villages, because he was proficient, almost by heart, in the entire Talmud and Rambam, will now be the associate of wagon drivers. This thought brought him to tears.

After a few moments Rabbi Yosef realized that it was almost time to recite the midnight prayers (*Tikkun Chatzot*). He prepared himself to go to synagogue to say the midnight prayers with a minyan, as was his custom, and then to say the morning prayers at the crack of dawn.

Rabbi Yosef regularly attended the synagogue for the midnight prayers. In the summer he would pray the morning service at the crack of dawn. On the weekdays he would pray for two to three hours and on the holy Sabbath he would pray for four to five hours. After the morning prayers he would study Talmud and Rambam for approximately three hours. He would then eat breakfast. After breakfast he would nap for one hour. He would then learn for approximately four hours with his students. Then he would eat dinner, sleep for three hours and learn another two hours with his students. He would then review Mishnah for an hour. In addition, he regularly reviewed Torah teachings by heart before going to sleep, morning, afternoon and night. The afternoon services would be prayed with the congregation and then he would teach the congregants Talmud, followed by evening services. During the winter months he modified this schedule to fit with the different lengths of day and night.

That night, Rabbi Yosef recited the midnight service with a greater degree of broken heartedness. He wept bitterly over his personal catastrophe, that in his old age he would have to leave the halls of Torah. Not only did he not accept a rabbinical post, but now he would also be stripped of the raiment of a Torah scholar and would have to dress in the filthy clothes of a wagon driver. All this, though he was not in any financial distress, thank G-d. Rabbi Yosef prayed from the depth of his heart and pleaded with G-d to save him from his distress.

Besides his general anguish, Rabbi Yosef had particular anguish because of the pure words of his wife. He was anguished by the fact that when she heard what the Alter Rebbe had told him, she did not hesitate for even a moment and gave her opinion with complete trust and simple faith in the Rebbe.

He was ashamed of himself from the inner depths of his heart. After all, He, Rabbi Yosef, had a bond with the Rebbe for thirty-five years and had devoted himself to the study of the teachings of *Chassidus* for over forty years. Nonetheless, when it came to fulfilling something which he felt was below his imagined honor, he was thrown into confusion for over two weeks of distress, in which his life was not a life.

He compared himself to his wife. She was a simple woman, who had no real grasp of the true worth of people of understanding and Divine service and who could not possibly begin to fathom the essential spiritual level of a “Rebbe”, or matters of Divine inspiration, nor understand how the Rebbe’s

“Open eyes” could to peer into the future. Nonetheless, because of her proper upbringing, she had simple and pure faith in the *Tzaddikim*, the servants of HaShem. She did not hesitate even for a moment, as he did, and gave her opinion in the affirmative immediately, even offering to sell her jewelry so that the holy words of the Rebbe could be fulfilled quickly.

With this, Rabbi Yosef started to contemplate the great importance of proper upbringing. He himself had been raised in the lap of Torah and fear of heaven. His father, Rabbi Abba, had been a great *Tzaddik*. Though he earned his livelihood as a tailor, nonetheless, in all his days it never happened that he did not get up at midnight and recite the midnight prayers and study Torah until daybreak. Throughout his life he never engaged in idle conversation, not only on the holy day of Shabbos but even during the days of the week. Furthermore, on Shabbos and Holidays he only spoke words of Torah and on such days, he only spoke the Holy Tongue (Biblical Hebrew). He would fast every Monday and Thursday and keep “little Yom Kippur”. Furthermore, he took care never to look beyond his four cubits and he would give tithes from all his earnings.

In addition, his mother too was a very G-d fearing woman who was always involved in many charitable endeavors. She was always the first to volunteer for *Hachnasas Kallah* (providing for the needs of poor brides). She was an expert in medicinal remedies and always visited the sick or mothers who had recently given birth and she supervised her sons and daughters with great care in all

matters of the fear of heaven. However, Rabbi Yosef mused, with all this, he still lacked simple and pure faith in the *Chachamim* (the Sages). However, his wife, a simple woman who was raised in the home of her father, the *Chassid*, Rabbi Nesanel Soifer, had complete faith in the *Tzaddikim* without even a moment's hesitation.

Rabbi Yosef sat silently for a long while after his prayers recalling the days of his youth and young adulthood when he was nourished by the teachings of his teacher, the *Gaon*, Rabbi Avraham Ze'ev, Sagi-Nahor and when he lived on the estate of his father-in-law, Rabbi Zelig HaTamim (The Pure).

He remembered one of his conversations, many years before, with a guest who was a Torah scholar. This scholar had been one of the students of the *Baal Shem Tov* (The founder of the *Chassidic* Movement). He was the first to open Rabbi Yosef's eyes to the ways of *Chassidism* when he explained that the beginning of everything is to have pure faith in the *Chachamim* and the *Tzaddikim*.

He remembered that this Torah scholar had explained the difference between having faith in the *Chachamim* and having faith in the *Tzaddikim* and that he had contemplated this subject for two years afterwards. He had discovered many words of our sages in both the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud that substantiated the scholar's words. He also recalled many conversations that he had with his *Chassidic* comrades on his visits to Lioznia or Liadi, and it suddenly dawned on him that up to this point he had been

lacking and incomplete in his faith in *Tzaddikim*. This caused him to weep silently and he was simply incapable of learning Torah during this time, as was his custom.

For two days he walked about not knowing what to do. His wife had already given him the money she had gotten by selling her jewelry and in the meantime Shabbos, the day of rest, came. Try as he may to distract his mind from his predicament, he was incapable of doing so, because he knew that when Shabbos would end, he would be under the yoke of a different occupation. This would be his last Shabbos as Rabbi Yosef the Teacher. By next Shabbos he would already be Yosef Baal Agala (Yosef the wagon driver). In his imagination he pictured how it would be and his soul mourned for him. He thought, “What will be of my Torah learning?” and he wept bitterly.

A new thought began to gnaw at him. “Am I truly worried about what will become of my Torah learning or is it just my inner pride, haughtiness and loss of dignity that I am upset about?” Upon contemplating this he remembered his friend, one of the *Chassidim* of the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua the Teamster of Velliz and he was suddenly hit with ecstatic joy, like a lightning bolt.

“Is not Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua a teamster from his youth? And is he not fluent in the entire *Tanach* (The twenty-four books of the Bible), the six orders of the *Mishnah* and *Tanya* by heart? And he has an outstanding knowledge of all the laws of *Orach Chayim* (The first section of *Shulchan Aruch*, the “Code of Jewish Law”). Besides this, his sons are

outstanding Torah scholars. His son Binyamin is a *Rav* in Vitebsk, his son Yaakov Aryeh is a *Rav* in Kalisk and his son-in-law Rabbi Raphael Yitzchak is a *Rosh Yeshivah* (The Chief Rabbi of a Rabbinical Academy) in the city of Nevel.”

With this realization he felt like a new spirit of life was breathed into him. He wondered why he hadn't remembered Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua of Velliz in the first place. If he had, he would not have had to suffer all this anguish and loss of Torah learning and service of HaShem.

“It is possible to be a teamster, a scholar and servant of G-d at the same time,” thought Rabbi Yosef, “And the proof of it is Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua, who reviews *Tanach*, *Mishnah* and *Tanya* by heart as he travels. I too will do this. When I travel from town to town, I will review *Mishnah* and *Tanya* by heart and when I stop at an inn or boarding house I will then learn in depth!”

After Shabbos he told his wife that he knows a teamster in the town of Velliz who himself is a Torah scholar and whose sons are rabbis and Torah scholars. “I will go to him to learn the trade.” That Sunday he arose early, took the money pouch and set off to Velliz.

When he arrived in Velliz Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua was not home. He had gone to the big fair in the city of Nevel and would not be returning for two weeks. Rabbi Yosef decided to go to Nevel too. He arrived before the holy day of Shabbos and was greeted as an honored guest, since he had many *Chassidic* friends and acquaintances there. Even those who were not his acquaintances had heard of him and this caused a

great rejoicing amongst the learned of the city, for his good name had preceded him.

That Shabbos was *Shabbos HaGadol* (The Shabbos before the holiday of Passover). All three Shabbos meals were eaten with a *minyan* of at least ten men, each in a different place. They all delighted in words of Torah and tales of yore. All the *Chassidim* were in a joyful spirit except for Rabbi Yosef who was aggravated by the knowledge that in a few short days he will be wearing the garb of a wagon driver, whip in hand.

Throughout Shabbos he observed Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua and listened in on his conversations. He saw clearly that all the *Chassidim* and learned men treated him with honor and respect and even love, without regard to his occupation as a wagon driver. He never heard anyone call him Chaim Yehoshua the wagon driver. Rather, he was called Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua Vellizer. “Not so when I am a wagon driver,” He mused to himself, “They will call me Yosef the wagon driver.” And his spirit fell within him.

The next day, after the morning prayers, Rabbi Yosef said to Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua that he came to Nevel because he has a very important matter that he needs to discuss with him. They went to a private room and closed the door behind them.

He told Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua that he had married the daughter of Rabbi Nesanel Soifer of Beshenkovitz, a very good woman. (Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua was acquainted with Rabbi Nesanel Soifer. They had met in Lioznia and Liadi.) G-

d had blessed them with a son, may he live long, and they named him Abba Zelig, after his father and after his former father-in-law. Furthermore, thank G-d, he has a good livelihood from his wife's grocery store. He himself has students who he teaches Torah for free, since he does not need the income. However, because of a certain secret reason he must become a wagon driver. Therefore he has come to learn this skill. Will Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua please teach him the tricks of the trade? He also told him that he brought sufficient funds to buy a horse and wagon and whatever other equipment would be necessary.

Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua was shocked by what he heard. He looked wide eyed at Rabbi Yosef, thinking that he had lost his mind. Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua just sat there, dumbfounded. All he could do was shake his head in sympathy for his poor friend, who had seemingly gone mad, heaven help us. It took some time for Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua to collect himself enough to say, "What kind of foolishness has gotten into you, Rabbi Yosef? After toiling so greatly in Torah for over forty years, you choose to become a wagon driver?"

Rabbi Yosef broke into tears. He was so overcome with emotions that he couldn't speak. Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua likewise wept and said, "Why do you cry Rabbi Yosef? Who is compelling you to be a wagon driver and weep? Leave this foolishness and go home to your Torah learning and Divine service!"

Rabbi Yosef stood up. (This was the custom of the early *Chassidim* when they would repeat the holy words of the Rebbe; they would stand up.) He repeated the holy words of the Rebbe, whose soul reposes in Eden; the words that he told him during his private audience with him in the year 1804. “All the Rebbe’s words have been fulfilled,” he added, “The marriage to a woman with children from a previous marriage, the birth of a son and now an offer from the important representatives of Leiplie to be the chief Rabbi of their city. Accordingly, it seems that now the time has come for me to become a wagon driver.”

When Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua heard these words he said, “This being the case, what are you crying about? You should be rejoicing and celebrating that you have the opportunity to fulfill the command of our holy Rebbe, whose soul reposes in Eden! Come, I will select a good horse and wagon and all the equipment that you need. This very day Koppel, my assistant, will teach you how to harness the horse to the wagon. Within two or three days you will learn everything there is to know of this profession.

Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua’s words sent Rabbi Yosef’s head reeling. He answered, “Can’t the holy words of our Rebbe be fulfilled in a different manner? Let me become your business partner. I will give you the funds that I brought to buy a horse and wagon and we can employ your assistant Koppel or someone else to do the work. I too will sometimes

travel with him as a wagon driver. We'll split the profits fifty, fifty."

"No," Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua answered him, "The holy words of our Rebbe will not be fulfilled in such a manner. He specifically said that for the good of your soul, it is better for you to be a teamster than a Rabbi. Therefore, for your own good you yourself must become a teamster!"

After Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua emphasized this point three or four times Rabbi Yosef had to concede that it was the "bribery" of his self-love and imagined dignity which blinded his clear thinking on the matter. He therefore set off with Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua to make all the necessary arrangements.

Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua publicized the matter (that the Alter Rebbe had commanded Rabbi Yosef to be a wagon driver) and in short order news spread that Rabbi Yosef the Understanding, as the *Chassidim* called him, or Rabbi Yosef the Provider of Sustenance, as he was called by the learned men in all the surrounding areas, had become a wagon driver.

Part Three

Rabbi Dov Ber becomes the new Rebbe

Several weeks passed and Rabbi Yosef was already becoming accustomed to his new profession. His route was from the city of Beshenkovitch to all the surrounding towns. He made it his rule never to hurry in his travels. At night he would stop at an inn and study Torah and when he would arrive at his destination he would stay the whole day and devote himself to Torah study. He did this for a year until he became quite accustomed to his situation.

Now, after the passing of our holy Rabbi, our master, teacher and rabbi, the Alter Rebbe, on the fourteenth day of Tevet, 1812, his son, the Mittler Rebbe (The Holy Rabbi Dovber of Lubavitch, the second Chabad Rebbe) stayed for some time in the city of Kremenchog, in Little Russia. His son-in-law, Rabbi Menachem Mendel, the author of “Tzemach Tzedek” and his household, lived temporarily in the town of Haditch, where the Alter Rebbe was interned. The remainder of the Alter Rebbe’s family settled in the town of Romen near Haditch.

For a three month period there was a great arousal amongst the Chabad *Chassidim* throughout Russia. The *Chassidim* of Little Russia and the Ukraine gathered in several central cities and elected representatives to be sent to our master, teacher and rabbi, the Mittler Rebbe, to request of him to establish his residence in one of the cities of Little Russia.

In the meantime the *Chassidim* of White Russia also gathered in several central cities and elected representatives to be sent to our master, teacher and rabbi, the Mittler Rebbe, to request that he return to White Russia, the land of his birth, and establish his residence there, in a town of his liking.

The representatives of White Russia were victorious over the representatives of Little Russia and after the holiday of Shavuos of the year 1813 our master, teacher and rabbi, the Mittler Rebbe, left Kremenchog and established his residence in White Russia.

The Mittler Rebbe traveled from city to city and from place to place for a period of three months until he arrived in the city of Vitebsk. Upon his arrival in each place he spoke the words of the Living G-d (*Chassidic Discourses*) and was received with great honor, not only from the Jews but also from the government officials and the local police. They had received instructions from the office of the interior minister to honor Rabbi Shneuri greatly, being that he was the son of Rabbi Baruchovitch of Liadi who had done much for the good of Mother Russia during the Napoleonic wars. The government of Russia recognized his contribution to the war effort and requested that his son, who had filled his rabbinical post, be honored accordingly.

The Mittler Rebbe chose the town of Lubavitch to be his permanent residence. On the Shabbos of *Parashat Tavo*, Rabbi Dovber, the Mittler Rebbe, was in the city of Liadi, and

on Monday of the week of *Parashat Netzavim-VaYelech*, the eighteenth day of Elul of the year 5573 from Creation (1813) our master, teacher and rabbi, the Mittler Rebbe, entered the town of Lubavitch to make his residence there.

This day, in which the Mittler Rebbe deemed it fitting to establish his holy residence in the town of Lubavitch, is engraved for good memory in our family and in the memory of all the *Chassidim* of Chabad, being that the eighteenth day of the month of Elul coincided with the birthday of the holy Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the *Chassidic* Movement.

The coming of the Mittler Rebbe caused a tremendous impression throughout all of White Russia and Lithuania and many multitudes of people streamed to him from all the towns and townlets. Lord Tchekovsky, whose domain included the town of Lubavitch and all its adjacent villages, commanded the manager of his estates to bring lumber and to build houses for the Rebbe and his family.

The *Chassidim* of White Russia strengthened the fund for the settlers of the Holy Land and the fund for the Rebbe's household. Furthermore, they imposed a tax upon all the *Chassidic* synagogues of White Russia to support the hospitality of all the many guests that came to see the Rebbe.

From month to month, during that winter the good name of the Mittler Rebbe spread throughout the cities of Lithuania and White Russia and the number of pilgrims to the town of Lubavitch constantly increased. The joy of the *Chassidim* of White Russia and Lithuania knew no bounds.

By the time that the Mittler Rebbe had resided in Lubavitch for a year, many of the elder *Chassidim* who had been amongst the first followers of the Alter Rebbe, had come to visit the Mittler Rebbe and were very impressed and satisfied with him. This made a fantastic impression on the *Chassidim* of White Russia and Lithuania.

Part Four

Rabbi Yosef meets Shlomo Leib

Now, the *Chassid*, Rabbi Yosef of Beshenkovitch also longed to go to Lubavitch. However, for various reasons he was unable to do so. Thus, much time passed and he had still not gone to Lubavitch. During the winter of the year 1816, he made preparations for a trip to Lubavitch, however, the winter passed and he still had not gone. One day, sometime between Passover and Shavuos of the year 1816 Rabbi Yosef was hauling a load to the town of Senna. On the way, towards day's end, he stopped at an inn. This inn was situated at an intersection of highways.

That evening, the count of Batchaikov came to this inn. When news that the count was staying at the Jewish inn reached the nearby village, the village priest along with the village dignitaries came to the inn to invite the count to come and stay in their village.

The count could not refuse their hospitality and went with them. However, one of his entourage stayed at the Jewish inn, since he had to go to Senna on an important mission for the count. During all this Rabbi Yosef had been sitting outside under a bush near a threshing floor studying Torah. When he finished his studies he came into the inn. The innkeeper introduced him to the member of the count's entourage and asked him if he could take him to Senna. "Good", said Rabbi Yosef, "Tomorrow we will, G-d willing, make our way to

Senna.” “At what time?” the guest asked. “After Prayers” answered Rabbi Yosef. “At what time?” the guest repeated, this time with a tinge of anger in his voice and a condescending look in his eyes. “I could care less if you pray or not. I need to know when we will start on our way so that I’ll know when to get up, wash, eat and drink.” “And Pray” continued Rabbi Yosef, as if to finish the other’s sentence. “I will leave the praying to you,” The guest answered, “I need not pray.” “How could it be,” Rabbi Yosef replied wide eyed, “That a Jew does not need to pray? In the morning services, besides praying, there is also the obligation to put on *Tefillin*. Furthermore, according to one opinion, the arm *Tefillin* and the head *Tefillin* are two separate *Mitzvos* (commandments). How is it possible for a Jew to not put on *Tefillin* or pray!?!”

Instead of answering, the guest turned to the inn keeper and asked him to wake him about an hour before the wagon leaves. The inn keeper answered that he can sleep to his heart’s content and he will still have plenty of time to wash, eat and drink to his satisfaction. “I’m sure you will not leave before ten in the morning.”

Upon hearing this, the guest became very agitated and commanded the innkeeper to hire a wagon from the village at any cost, as long as they do not leave later than five in the morning. He then went to his room to sleep. Rabbi Yosef ate his supper and then went to his room. He slept for one hour and then got up to recite the midnight prayers, as was his custom.

The guest was suddenly jarred awake and frightened by the sound of weeping outside his room. He got up out of bed, opened the door and beheld the wagon driver sitting on the ground and reading from a book by the light of a candle, and crying.

The sound of Rabbi Yosef's sobbing entered the guest's heart, and brought back long forgotten memories of his youth and childhood. He remembered how he was brought up in his father's house and by his teachers. He remembered his wife and children whom he had abandoned years earlier when he went off on his wild in wanton ways. This brought to mind the Christian woman that he had married and that she had given birth to three children, two sons and a daughter. The eldest son and his sister had died but the youngest son still lived. He was gripped with intense bitterness by these thoughts.

Rabbi Yosef concluded the midnight service and then recited the morning blessings with great emotional arousal. He then went to immerse in the river. When he returned he donned his *Tallis* and *Tefillin* and prayed with great *Dveikus* (Adhesion to HaShem).

During these prayers Rabbi Yosef recalled the private audience he had with the Alter Rebbe in the year 1804. He beheld the Alter Rebbe as if before his very eyes, and he heard his voice saying, "For the good of your soul it is better for you to be a wagon driver than to take a rabbinical post." He compared his situation then, when he sat and studied Torah,

either alone or with his students, to his present situation, and he wept greatly.

Rabbi Yosef's voice reminded the guest of his own father's voice. He too used to pray with much feeling and fiery emotion. He had heard from his father many times that his Rebbe, the *Tzaddik* Rabbi Shlomo, was accustomed to doing this too. "Who knows?" he thought to himself, "Maybe this wagon driver is a student of some *Tzaddik*."

He remembered a certain incident which happened in their city. A very serious question on Jewish law developed. The Rabbi, who was the leader of the community, try as he may, could not solve the dilemma and come up with a satisfactory resolution. After much debate, all the great Torah scholars of the city (which was the city of Toltchin in the province of Podolia) finally agreed with the opinion of his father, Rabbi Tzvi Nagar (The Carpenter).

His father, Rabbi Tzvi Nagar, had a good name in the entire district. He was famous as a great Torah scholar and enthusiastic Chasid. Though he had been offered rabbinical posts on several occasions he had turned them down.

The guest, whose name was Shlomo Leib, recalled the details of the path his life had taken. He remembered his youth, his young adulthood, and the initial steps which caused him to veer from the way of life his father had taught him.

He had a friend, by the name of Avraham Dov, who had extraordinary talents. He was an outstanding Torah scholar and very devout and G-d fearing. However, he

suddenly abandoned his previous outlook and became one of the leading proponents of the enlightenment movement. It was the influence of this friend that first caused him to cut himself off from his father's way of life. He descended lower and lower, after his father's death, leaving town and abandoning his wife and children in the process.

Once, while staying at an inn, he met a landowner from Chernigov who hired him to manage his estate. There, he threw off the yoke of Judaism altogether and became the close companion of the young lord who owned the estate. When the lord became engaged to the daughter of the count of Bachaikov, he traveled with him to Bachaikov as his private secretary. There he met his non-Jewish wife.

Now, in the meantime, as the guest was contemplating all this, the innkeeper knocked on his door. The guest understood that, most likely, the innkeeper wanted to notify him that the teamster which he had hired from the village at his request would soon be arriving. The guest, however, decided not to travel with this teamster. He would rather wait for the Jewish teamster. When he opened the door, the innkeeper informed him that he had hired a good carriage for him, which would be arriving within the hour, and that hot tea was brewed and ready for him.

Shlomo Leib thanked him for his efforts and told him that he was considering staying several more hours. He handed him a silver coin to give to the teamster as compensation for having troubled himself for nothing. As for the hot tea, he would not drink any just yet. Hurriedly, he shut

the door. A river of tears had burst from his eyes and a storm was raging in his heart, so affected was he by the prayers of the teamster.

Part Five

Shlomo Leib has thoughts of Repentance and becomes Sick

His heart opened with a rush of memories, like an overflowing fountain. He remembered his wife and children. Who knows if they are still alive or how they earn their livelihood. How much anguish have they suffered because of him; the anguish of shame and embarrassment; the anguish of poverty and starvation. “And for what reason?” he asked himself.

He remembered how his wife, a woman of upright values and righteous conduct, had honored and respected him, how beloved he was to his wise and learned father-in-law and how his mother-in-law, a good and upright woman, had honored him. “Cursed is the day”, he thought to himself, “when I met that heretic, Avraham Dov, who led me astray from the path of life”, and he wept bitterly with all his soul.

Several hours passed and Rabbi Yosef still prayed with fiery emotion, his voice quivering and entreating. This made an incredible impression upon Shlomo Leib. He paced to and fro, from one side of the room to the other, unable to find a resting place.

Rabbi Yosef’s prayers during the blessing of, “Ahavas Olam-Eternal Love”, his entreaties during the prayer of, “Avinu, Av HaRachaman-Our Father, Merciful Father”, his supplications during the prayer of, “Lo Nevosh V’Lo

Nekaleim-Let Us not be shamed or disgraced”, and his yearning when he said, “Shma Yisrael-Hear O Israel”, shattered Shlomo Leib’s heart, and he swore to himself that from that day on, come what may, he will return to HaShem with perfect repentance. He resolved to return to his wife and children, to his faith and to his G-d. He went to the innkeeper and asked to borrow his Tallis and Tefillin. Then he returned to his room, donned them and prayed with much weeping.

In the meantime, Rabbi Yosef concluded his prayers, studied Torah, as was his custom, and began to prepare for the journey. However, the guest was still shut in his room. When Rabbi Yosef heard that he had borrowed the innkeeper’s Tallis and Tefillin, he decided to wait until he concluded his prayers.

On this journey Rabbi Yosef was hauling several different goods from Beshenkovitch to Senna, but since there was no urgency he waited until the guest would be ready to leave.

After about an hour the guest opened his door and called for the innkeeper. He told him that he felt ill and was unable to travel. Since he very much wanted to travel with the Jewish teamster, would the innkeeper please impress it upon the teamster to wait until he felt better? He would be willing to pay extra for the delay, over and above the travel fee. In addition, he would pay for his room and board during the delay.

Rabbi Yosef agreed to wait. However, as evening approached the illness worsened and the guest lay listlessly, like a block of wood. He was burning with a high fever.

Throughout the night, in his feverish delirium, he spoke disjointed and rambling words, mentioning names of different men and women, both Jew and non-Jew. Some he angrily cursed with blood curdling oaths and from others he pleaded for mercy and compassion. Thus, he spent a fitful and sleepless night, until at daybreak he finally calmed down and slept.

In the morning, Yaakov Leib, the teamster of Batchaikov, arrived at the inn with passengers on their way to several fairs in the district of Senna. When Yaakov Leib saw the sick guest he immediately recognized him as Solomon Gametzky, the confidant and advisor of the young count, the son-in-law of the old prince.

Yaakov Leib told Rabbi Yosef of the evil and sinful ways and deeds of Solomon Gametzky and that he had a gentile wife and son. However, “The Heretic Gametzky” (as he was called by the Jews of Batchaikov) does have one good quality in that he helps the Jews. From the time that he came to Batchaikov with the young prince, all the properties of both the old and young prince; the water mill, the wind mill, the rivers for fishing and the inns upon the roads, were all either sold or leased only to Jews. Furthermore, this was all done on good terms, so that they could earn a decent livelihood.

When Shlomo Leib awoke from his sleep he asked the innkeeper to call the Jewish teamster to come to him in his

room. When Rabbi Yosef entered, Shlomo Leib asked him to sit and began to recount his whole life story, from beginning to end. He related everything that had occurred to him from the time that he strayed from the straight path to that very day. He also told him that as of yesterday he had decided to return to HaShem with perfect repentance. Come what may, he planned to leave his evil ways and return to his wife and children. When he finished speaking he remained silent for several moments and then lifted his voice in sobbing, so that his whole body shook.

Rabbi Yosef was shocked by what he heard and his emotions became confused and tumultuous. One moment he was angry at Shlomo Leib and the next moment he felt compassion for him. Nonetheless, when he saw how passionate Shlomo Leib was in his commitment and realized that he was truly repentant and sorry for his evil ways and deeds, he felt great pity for him and tried to comfort him.

Rabbi Yosef's words of comfort only caused Shlomo Leib to become even more agitated. He cried bitterly from the depths of his soul saying that for a sinner such as him there is no remedy save death, accompanied with great affliction. Only through such punishment could his many sins be atoned for. He said that he would accept everything, even the most terrible afflictions, so long as he could be free of his gentile wife and their son, who was born in impurity. He only wished to return to his Jewish wife and children so that he could remove the shame and suffering which he had caused them.

In the course of an hour or so, Shlomo Leib calmed down and asked to borrow Rabbi Yosef's Tallit and Tefillin for prayer. However, due to his weakness Rabbi Yosef had to help him don them. At the conclusion of his prayers his fever increased and he began to weep and speak in disjointed sentences. Rabbi Yosef, however, who knew his distress, understood that they were words of repentance and regret over the past.

That afternoon, a wagon arrived from Palotsk on its way to Vitebsk. Amongst the passengers was the famous physician, Rabbi Yitzchak Zelig Palotsker, who was well known throughout the region. At the request of the innkeeper he examined the patient and expressed his opinion that he was in a very serious and dangerous condition. He drew his blood, provided him with medicines and then continued on his journey.

Since the patient had poured his heart out to Rabbi Yosef, Rabbi Yosef decided that he must not leave the patient while he is in such a condition. He resolved that if HaShem returns Shlomo Leib to his full health, he will help him fulfill his oath to return to his Jewish wife and children. However, who knows what the day could bring and if, G-d forbid, the worst should happen, he would have to inform Shlomo Leib's wife and children, since no one else but Rabbi Yosef knew of Shlomo Leib's secret. Thus he resolved not to leave until he was confident that his health was improving.

Moreover, Rabbi Yosef thought that since Shlomo Leib was repentant and regretful about the past, it was his

personal duty and obligation to help him as much as possible in this regard. He therefore gave over the merchandise he was transporting to the teamster Yaakov Leib to take to Senna. He himself would stay at the inn with the patient.

The medicine given by Rabbi Yitzchak Zelig did not help and the fever grew from hour to hour. Three full days of very high fever thus transpired. In the meantime, the Count of Batchaikov became aware that the close confidant and advisor of his son-in-law, the young Prince, had taken ill in the Jewish inn at the crossroads. The count commanded his court physician to travel post-haste to the inn and return with the patient to the palace. On the other hand, if he finds his condition to be serious, he should take him to Vitebsk, the regional capital, where the medical care was on a higher level than at his court. He also commanded the doctor that under no circumstances should he inform the patient of his personal misfortune, in that three days earlier, his wife and son had gone on a boating excursion and had drowned in the river when their boat capsized.

The court physician found the patient in a very grave condition. He suffered from inflammation of the brain and it would be life-threatening to move him. He treated him as well as he could and sent a message by way of courier to his master, the Count, informing him of Shlomo Leib's condition and that he could not be held responsible in case of death, because the fever was worsening hourly and Shlomo Leib was literally in the throes of death. Only G-d could save him now.

The young prince sent an urgent message to one of his acquaintances in the regional capital of Vitebsk who was an important physician, asking him to quickly travel to the inn at the crossroads where his confidant and advisor, Solomon Gametzky, lay deathly ill.

When the doctor arrived he found that the patient's condition had improved somewhat, but that he was still in danger. He consulted with the court physician and they agreed to administer various medications designed to strengthen him physically, so that he could withstand the illness.

Part Six

Rabbi Yosef fasts and prays for Shlomo Leib's recovery

Now, in the meantime, when Rabbi Yosef realized the seriousness of Shlomo Leib's condition, he took it upon himself to fast day and night for two consecutive twenty-four hour periods ending with the commencement of Shabbos. He recited Psalms and prayed for Divine mercy and after Shabbos he began another twenty-four hour fast.

After three days of high fever, Shlomo Leib snapped out of his delirium and recognized the court physician. However, when in an effort to comfort him the doctor told him that in a day or two his wife will come to visit him, he became very emotional and slipped back into his delirium, until he just lay there motionless, like a block of wood.

Meanwhile, news arrived at the inn of the accident in which the patient's wife and son had drowned when their boat capsized. Hundreds of peasants were searching the length and breadth of the Vitba River before it flowed into the larger Dvina River. As of yet, the bodies had not been recovered.

The doctor told the innkeeper that the patient is worried about his wife and son and that he must love them passionately. He speculated that this must be the reason for his regression, because when he tried to comfort him that tomorrow or the day after they would visit, he began to sigh and moan and lost his senses. He tried to revive him with

strong medications but nothing helped and he fears that these are his last hours on this earth. Therefore, he must urgently send a courier to the court of the Count informing him of the situation.

During all this Rabbi Yosef was so engrossed in fasting, reciting Psalms and praying that he was unaware of all that was going on with the patient. When the innkeeper told him what the doctor said, Rabbi Yosef immediately realized that Shlomo Leib was getting agitated at the mention of his non-Jewish wife and child. He turned to the doctor and asked him if he could visit the patient to perform the last rites of confession, being that he is so close to death and any moment could be his last.

The doctor looked at the Rabbi in astonishment and as if talking to himself said, “The patient is laying there like a block of wood and this old man wants to perform the rite of confession with him!?” “I will watch him closely”, said Rabbi Yosef and if he opens his eyes I will recite the confession with him.” “Do whatever you like”, the doctor answered. “I won’t stop you. Watch over him. His pulse is very weak. His soul is still not extinguished but he is near death.”

Upon entering the room Rabbi Yosef shut the door behind him, leaned over Shlomo Leib and whispered into his ear that his non-Jewish wife and son had drowned in the river and that now he can return to his Jewish wife and children without obstruction. He repeated these words several times until he saw that color was returning to Shlomo Leib’s cheeks. He repeated his words several more times. Suddenly the

patient opened his eyes and glanced fearfully here and there. Rabbi Yosef told him what had happened to his wife and child and that he still could fulfill the mitzvah of Tefillin, as the sun had not yet set.

In the evening, when the doctor returned to the inn from a long stroll he was shocked at the sight that lay before him. The patient's bed was in the middle of the big public room and surrounding it were Jews sitting and standing, engaged in eating and drinking. He looked on in bewilderment.

Recognizing the doctor's puzzlement the innkeeper rushed to him and explained that the patient had suddenly opened his eyes and asked to be moved to the public room. He also requested that all the guests at the inn should taste something and bless him.

The doctor approached Shlomo Leib and felt his pulse. He then requested that a courier be sent post-haste to the court of the Count with good tidings of the patient's condition. He told Shlomo Leib that in a matter of a few days he could travel home and that he himself would be leaving early next morning.

In morning Rabbi Yosef prepared to leave and return home, but Shlomo Leib pressed him to stay. He said that since Rabbi Yosef was the only one who knew his secret, therefore he should help him fulfill his oath to return to his Jewish wife and children. He asked that because he is still weak, Rabbi Yosef should wait until after Shabbos and that in the

meantime they should discuss what arrangements need to be made. Rabbi Yosef agreed.

Part Seven

Rabbi Yosef goes to Lubavitch

On Shabbat an officer of the Count's court arrived in a coach hitched to two stallions. He bore a letter from the young prince stating that since Shlomo Leib is still weak, his advice was that he travel to Vitebsk, the regional capital, and seek the professional counsel of the physicians there. The letter also stated that he should await the prince who would be arriving there at the end of the week. Shlomo Leib asked Rabbi Yosef to accompany him to Vitebsk, but Rabbi Yosef refused. He returned home to Beshenkovich and Shlomo Leib went to Vitebsk.

When Rabbi Yosef returned home he found that many of the elder Chasidim were preparing to go on a pilgrimage to Lubavitch to visit the Holy Rebbe, our master, teacher and rabbi, Rabbi Dov Ber, the Mittler Rebbe. They were planning on leaving in a week. Rabbi Yosef was aroused with the desire to join them. He rented his horse and wagon to another teamster until his return from Lubavitch and joined the pilgrimage.

Approximately forty Chasidim left Beshenkovich together and in each town and settlement that they passed, more people joined them, so that by the time they reached Vitebsk there already were about one hundred and eighty pilgrims. There they met other groups of people preparing to set off for Lubavitch.

Rabbi Yosef told his son Abba Zelig, “More than two thousand guests arrived in Lubavitch that year for the holiday of Shavuot. It is impossible to describe our great joy when we saw that with HaShem’s help, blessed be He, our master, teacher and rabbi, the Alter Rebbe left us a Rebbe that would guide us in the paths of life with true life.”

“One day”, Rabbi Yosef told his son Abba Zelig, “To my great surprise I met Shlomo Leib Gametzky, the patient from the inn, walking on the street in Lubavitch with a Young Chasid. He immediately recognized me and was extremely happy to see me. He told me everything that happened to him from the time of that incident until then. The prince had come to Vitebsk and told him that for business reasons he wanted to send him to the Ukraine – his actual reason was to send him away so that he would not find out about his wife and son’s death.”

“I decided to tell the prince that I knew what had happened to my wife and son, that I could not bear to return to the place where it happened and would he please release me from my obligations to him. At first he would not hear of it, but after a few days he told me that he knows that in the nearby town of Lubavitch lives a holy man of G-d, a great rabbi in Israel. ‘Go to him’, he said, ‘and do whatever he tells you to do.’”

Our holy master, teacher and rabbi, Rabbi Dov Ber, the Mittler Rebbe, arranged a regimen of rectification for Rabbi Shlomo, who became a complete Baal Teshuva – a

returnee to Torah and Mitzvos. He commanded him to leave the prince and return home to his wife and children.

That very year a tract on repentance was published in the Yiddish language by our holy master, teacher and rabbi, the Mittler Rebbe. This tract is a regimen of how a Baal Teshuvah should conduct himself.

“My father remained in Lubavitch for two months that year” Abba Zelig related. “When he entered for Yechidus (private audience) with our holy master, teacher and rabbi, the Rebbe appointed him to fill the post of Nachum the elder in directing the Chasidic congregation on Market street.

The Mittler Rebbe said to him; “My father came to me and said that Yosef Beshenkovitcher has fulfilled the intention.” And he concluded, “For the sake of the good of an individual, my father made a scholar into a teamster and I say that for the sake of the public good it is worthwhile to make a teamster into a Chasidic Mashpiah (mentor) who directs the Chasidic congregation on Market street in Beshenkovitch.

“When my father came home from Lubavitch he sold the horse and wagon. He was done with being a teamster and became a Chasidic Mashpiah. Until old age he would walk on foot to Lubavitch. When his strength finally failed him in his advanced years and he could no longer walk there, he refused to ride in the wagon. He said, ‘To Jerusalem one must walk.’ When the Chasidim of Bashenkovitch would come to Lubavitch, our holy master, teach and rabbi would ask, ‘So how goes it with our venerable Rabbi Yosef, the Chasidic Mashpiah?’”

פוקח עורים

מאת כ"ק אדמו"ר דובער נבג"מ זי"ע

OPENING THE EYES OF THE BLIND

Pokeyach Ivrim

A Practical Guide for the Baal Teshuvah

By

Our Master, Teacher, and Rebbe

Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch

The Mittler Rebbe

One

Immediately upon waking from sleep every morning, and even before washing your hands for *Netilat Yadayim*, you should immediately arouse your thoughts to repentance. The very first thought that should enter your mind upon awakening should be an arousal to repent over all your alien and evil thoughts and lusts.

You should then wash your hands for *Netilat Yadayim* and recite the morning blessings and the blessings of the Torah. Immediately upon completing the blessings, you should recite Psalms with a broken and contrite heart. However, you should take great care not to delude yourself with false contrition, but rather, you should be earnest and sincere.

Summary: The very first thought of the day is the foundation for the conduct of the day, whether for good or for evil. Therefore, the very first thought of the day should be an arousal towards repentance in general.

Two

It states¹ that *HaShem* made everything with its opposite. Therefore, the opposite of the above is if a person's first thoughts upon awakening are thoughts that are alien to the service of *HaShem*, such as wicked or lustful thoughts. Because of this, a person will automatically be caused to be uprooted from his general thought and desire to connect his soul to *HaShem* in general. Moreover, if he is roused with sexual lusts and the like, he causes the depths of evil to be drawn upon his soul. The effect is that his heart will be drawn towards evil throughout the rest of the day, Heaven forbid.

Therefore, know and understand that the entire day is founded upon the foundational pillar upon which you establish your soul when you awaken. That is, the very first general thought you have upon awakening is of primary and critical importance. Thus, the greatest possible advice if a person does fall in this first thought of the day, is to immediately become embittered over this descent, and to immediately recite Psalms in general, with contrition. More specifically, you should recite Psalm Fifty-One, which can greatly assist a person to repent and rectify even grave sins, such as adultery, Heaven forbid.

¹ Ecclesiastes 7:14

Summary: If one's first thought is for evil, then he draws the very depths of evil upon himself. The advice for this, if it occurs, is to recite Psalms with a broken heart.

Three

The verse states,² “*HaShem* searches all hearts.” This means that the Holy One, blessed is He, knows everything. He thus examines, inspects, and knows all hidden and concealed matters and is able to investigate the inner truth in the depth of the heart of each individual.

Therefore, a person’s contrition should be such that his heart is truly shattered into little pieces, and not just in a passing fashion, like giving lip service. This is as stated,³ “*HaShem* is close to the broken hearted.” In other words, *HaShem* is close to those who are truly broken hearted, because they are truly embittered in the very innermost depths of their hearts, in a true and sincere manner. This is so if you truly desire to return to *HaShem* and repent of the sins of your youth so that your soul might have some hope of recovery and not be utterly cut off from its source, Heaven forbid. In such a case, the Holy One, blessed is He, will help and support you with additional strength from Above, so that you can return to *HaShem*. Thus, this causes additional strength and Godly light to be drawn forth to your soul, in general, and specifically to your mind of *Da’at*-knowledge, focus and awareness. From there it is drawn forth to illuminate your emotions as well.

The general principle is that wherever your mind is drawn to in the first thought of the day, that will set the tone for the remainder of the day. If your first thoughts are drawn

² Chronicles I 28:9

³ Psalms 34:19

towards return and repentance to *HaShem*, this will then be the general desire of all of the powers of your soul, and they will operate as one focused force to return to *HaShem*. The result of this is that you will automatically desist from evil in actuality, and you will establish a strong commitment within yourself not to draw your thoughts or desires into any kind of evil, Heaven forbid, nor will you even gaze at evil or forbidden matters with your eyes. All of this is tried and tested.

Summary: It is the bitterness and repentance at the very depths and the inner truth of one's heart that cause one to have a broken heart. When one has a broken heart, then *HaShem* will help him with additional strength so that he will completely desist from any evil, in actuality, and with all the powers of his soul.

Four

You have an obligation to yourself to set aside time, twice daily, to properly reflect and establish a broken and contrite heart with yourself, as mentioned above. One of these times should specifically be at night before going to sleep. You should recite the lengthy form of the *Shema* recital before retiring, according to the version of the liturgy set forth by the Ari”zal, of righteous memory. While reciting the lengthy confession you should make a specific accounting in your soul and recall all the sins of your youth in a way of particulars and details. While doing so, you should establish a strong commitment in your heart not to return to your corrupt ways, Heaven forbid, and to actually leave sin. For the root and primary aspect of repentance is to desist from sin in actuality. This is as stated,⁴ “Let the wicked one forsake his way, and the man of iniquity his thoughts.”

By following the above prescription, you draw forth additional strength into your soul in two manners. The first is caused by the confession that you make with a truly contrite heart, as said above. This itself will draw forth and cause great strength upon your soul, because,⁵ “The lip of truth is established forever.” Thus, your sincerity will strengthen you so that, going forward, you will be able to fully and truly repent permanently.

⁴ Isaiah 55:7

⁵ Proverbs 12:19

The second is because of the very depth of the light of truth which is caused to illuminate within your soul when you confess with a truly broken heart. This causes an arousal above at the very root and source of the abundant supernal mercies and you will be thereby granted assistance from Above to return to *HaShem* with complete repentance from the depth of your heart. The effect is that you will be completely forgiven and absolved of all of your sins and iniquities, as stated,⁶ “He who confesses and forsakes [sin], shall receive mercy.” That is, by doing so you draw forth an illumination of the supernal abundant mercies to illuminate your soul, even as it is manifest within your body. In this manner you will be spared of becoming banished and lost to the three completely impure husks of evil (*kliipot*), Heaven forbid.

Summary: He should set time aside for repentance twice daily; once in the morning and once at night prior to retiring to sleep. By means of his confession he will strengthen his repentance, and by means of his contrite heart he will arouse supernal divine mercy upon himself, and he will be forgiven.

⁶ Proverbs 28:13

Five

As a true penitent you should set aside additional auspicious times for awakening and establishing contrition in your heart. This is in addition to the two daily times, immediately upon waking from your sleep (as mentioned above) and upon going to sleep. That is, you should set aside time each week on Mondays and Thursdays, as well as on the day that precedes the new month (*Rosh Chodesh*). On these days, immediately after the *Amidah* prayer of the afternoon *Minchah* prayers, you should recite the extended confession (*Al Chet*) quietly to yourself.

When you recite the words of *Al Chet* – “For the sins that we have sinned before You” – you should actually recall all your own particular sins and pour your whole heart into the words that you recite with your lips. That is, you should specifically and fully confess all your aforementioned sins, and be truly contrite and anguished in your heart over your past misdeeds. You must establish a strong commitment in your heart not to return to your corrupt ways, Heaven forbid. Moreover, you should shed actual tears from the depths of your heart, as King David stated,⁷ “Every night I make my bed swim, I melt away my couch with my tears.”

You should do this always and not desist from this practice, even on a daily basis in the nightly confession that you recite with the *Shema* recital before going to sleep. More

⁷ Psalms 6:7

particularly, you should take care to do so when reciting the verse,⁸ “Into your hand I commit my spirit.” This verse is unique and must be said even by a Torah scholar, as it is called a “singular verse of prayer.”⁹ All of this will achieve a great rectification for all of the blemishes that have been caused in your soul, which is called,¹⁰ “The image of God.”

Summary: On Monday and Thursday, and on the day preceding the new moon (*Rosh Chodesh*) he is to awaken himself to repentance with a broken and contrite heart. On the day preceding the new month he is to recite the full confession with bitterness and supplications of mercy. On a nightly basis he is to have similar intentions when he recites the verse, “Into your hand I commit my spirit.”

⁸ Psalms 31:6

⁹ Talmud Bavli, Brachot 5a.

¹⁰ Genesis 1:27

Six

From all of the above it arises that there are two aspects to the matter of repentance (*Teshuvah*). The first is called repentance in action, which refers to actually desisting from sin, as stated above. The second is called repentance in the heart, which is a more internal aspect of repentance from the depths of the heart. In this second level one is moved to actual weeping with tears during the confessional, as mentioned above.

Now, a person is obligated to implement the aspect of repentance in action constantly, so that he does not forget about it, Heaven forbid. In other words, you must guard and distance yourself from sin with the ultimate distance, so that even your thoughts are not drawn into extraneous matters, Heaven forbid. In this manner you will no longer be drawn to think evil thoughts or act on them in actuality at all. It goes without saying that you must guard and distance your soul completely from going to places that might cause you to stumble and descend into evil, Heaven forbid.

It must be understood that, in truth, if a person intentionally merely thinks thoughts of sin and dwells on these thoughts, such as sexual lusts and the like, then he is called a wicked sinner who has no desire to truly repent. Even if he is occasionally roused to repent, it is not truly with any depth at all, as evident from the fact that he constantly and intentionally returns to his impurity, Heaven forbid.

Summary: There is repentance in the heart, and there is repentance in deed, which requires desisting from sin in actuality. He must constantly guard himself and distance himself from going to any place that may cause him to stumble and fall back into evil. One who intentionally thinks thoughts of sin or evil is called a wicked sinner – *Rasha*.

Seven

What generally arises from all the above is that the first and most primary aspect of repentance is in the thoughts of one's mind. By rectifying your thoughts, you will thereby automatically rectify the desires of your heart, which are called *Re'uta D'Leeba*. A good indicator to know that you have truly repented, is whether or not you have established a strong and firm commitment in your thought and mind that, going forward, you will desist and guard yourself, distancing yourself with the ultimate distance from doing any kind of forbidden thing and truly regretting any past transgressions, as previously mentioned. If you indeed do all this and are extremely careful in guarding your thoughts, then your heart will automatically no longer be drawn to desiring to do any kind of evil in actuality, Heaven forbid.

Summary: An indicator of true repentance is the strength of his commitment to guard his thoughts going forward, and the depth of his regret over his past. This is a primary principle in true repentance.

Eight

Now, there are other primary root matters that bring a person to repentance in his thoughts and heart. Moreover, these will ensure that his repentance is lasting and permanently fixed in his soul, so that,¹¹ “The lip of truth will endure forever.” What we are referring to is guarding one’s eyes. You must guard your eyes to such an extent that you should literally close your eyes from seeing any evil, even in a passing fashion. Certainly, you should utterly desist from intentionally gazing at beautiful women.

It goes without saying that you should minimize any necessary interactions with them and not consort with them whatsoever, Heaven forbid. For, through such interactions, the heart becomes aroused with the heat of alien lusts and passions, Heaven forbid, through which a person automatically reverts to all manner of evil that he was previously involved in. This will cause him to stumble and lose his path, Heaven forbid.

It is known that the eyes are the intermediaries of sin which draw forth the aforementioned alien fires of evil passions and lusts into the emotions of the heart. The heart then becomes an intermediary to bring one to act upon those lusts in actuality, Heaven forbid. The general principle is that,¹² “The eye sees and the heart lusts, and in the end, one is brought to action.”

¹¹ Proverbs 12:19

¹² Rashi to Numbers 15:39

This is the primary cause and reason for all damage or descents that occur with a penitent (*Ba'al Teshuvah*). They do not fully and completely return to *HaShem*, and they therefore stumble and return to their wayward ways, Heaven forbid, and their souls are caused to descend into the impurities of the depth of the abyss, Heaven save us. All this is caused because of the intermediaries of the eyes, as mentioned above. All of this has been tried and tested.

Summary: The root that brings one to true repentance in his thoughts and in his heart is that he should guard himself with the utmost care in his eyesight. He should take great caution to not even gaze upon anything evil that may arouse his lusts, even in a passing manner.

Nine

Now, even if you yourself have not fallen into such severe sins, may the Merciful One save us, you are nevertheless obligated to guard your soul in this matter. That is, you must close your eyes from gazing at any evil, as mentioned above. For it is the gazing that will cause you to be brought to nocturnal emissions and other such descents, Heaven save us.

Additionally, even women must guard themselves in all the above and distance themselves from this with the ultimate distance. For the effects of the aforementioned gazing take root in them to an even greater extent. Moreover, more often than not, they consider it fully permissible for them to gaze at handsome men, or to overly engage in conversation with men without restricting their spirits at all. Then, at night, during their sleep, they fall and stumble into all sorts of wicked ruminations and evil dreams of a sexual nature. This causes them to give birth to children who are born with bad illnesses, Heaven save us. Due to our abundant sins, many such children may come close to death, or only a small fraction of them may remain alive, may the Merciful One save us. All of this is due solely to this sin, God forbid.

Summary: Gazing brings to evil occurrences, and even women are obligated to take great care to guard themselves in this. Lack of guarding oneself in this matter can cause illness to one's offspring, and even their death, Heaven forbid.

Ten

Now, there is yet another important matter that relates to the roots that one must correct in order to come to true and complete repentance, and that is as follows: You must guard your soul from any kind of frivolity and merriment to which you might be drawn. You are drawn to this only because your heart is open to everything without any restraint of your spirit, which is called “The indolence of the heart” (*Zachut HaLev*). This is when a person’s heart is open to all manner of frivolity or merriment and every type of light-headedness, which is the opposite of seriousness.

If you are drawn into this, you will automatically come to speak excessively and run your tongue with an abundance of frivolous and idle chatter, and from this you can fall and succumb to all sorts of lusts of the physical world, in actuality. For example, you could come to fall into revelry, gluttony or drunkenness, only because of following the whims of your heart throughout the day. All this is the diametric opposite of repentance.

The reason for this is because, in truth, the primary matter of repentance is the aspect of the aforementioned broken heartedness. In other words, the true penitent is always contrite, and in his heart he is ashamed of his ways, so that he is in a state of constant lowliness. He therefore will not come to a state of light-headedness to engage in any of the aforementioned matters, God forbid.

There are two signs for this. The first is that he despises himself in his own eyes. He is constantly consternated and concerned in his heart over the sins of his youth, and his evil and lustful thoughts and sins, such as the sin of wasteful emission of seed, may the Merciful One save us. Because of this, he is automatically unable to hold his head and heart high with such excessive brazenness, to the extent that he will be unable to engage in abundant frivolous chatter or vain prattle. This holds true even if it is just small talk, rather than actual forbidden speech. Similarly, his heart will also not be drawn towards gluttony when it comes to food and drink, and the like.

For, when he considers himself in his own heart and recognizes all of his wicked and sinful deeds, he recognizes quite clearly that he has much to repair in his soul, and would be better off curbing his appetites through self-flagellation and fasting. Yet, he sees in himself that not only has he not rectified his soul, but on the contrary, he heaps iniquity upon iniquity to abandon his soul completely, Heaven forbid, to involve himself in frivolity and light-heartedness that cause his soul to descend to the very depths of the pits of the abyss, God forbid. He recognizes that should he follow that path he might fall back into his ways to such an extent that there will be no hope for him at all, God forbid. If he stumbles in this, he may never again come to a state of broken-hearted contrition again, and may become one of those individuals who are utterly cast out of the partition of the Holy One Blessed is He.

He might become one of those individuals about whom it states that they are no longer given the opportunity to repent.¹³ In other words, he recognizes that Satan, who is the evil inclination,¹⁴ is attempting to cause him to stumble and fall in all the above matters, to bring his soul to the very depths of utter destruction, so that he will never be able to repent, God forbid.

Summary: The “indolence of the heart” (*Zachut HaLev*) and its openness, lead to frivolity, scoffing, and light-headed idle chatter, which are the very opposite of repentance with shame and lowliness, to despise himself in his own eyes.

¹³ Mishneh Torah, Laws of Teshuva, Ch. 4.

¹⁴ Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 16a.

Eleven

The second sign for true repentance is that the contriteness and broken-heartedness that he possesses is also caused by the true power of the Godly light that constantly manifests within his soul, from higher than that which manifests within the grasp of his mind and heart. Because of this he will not exalt himself in his heart whatsoever, and will not even be drawn into permissible matters excessively, such as the consumption of permitted foods, or permitted sexual relations.

Moreover, he will not even be caused to become entrenched in becoming overly worried over any financial burdens, or incur any fear over his profits. The same is true of any experience of pain that he might incur, and therefore it certainly holds true that he will not become moved by any kinds of frivolity or scoffing, Heaven forbid.

The reason for this is that, because he despises himself in his own eyes, he acquires the aforementioned aspect of broken-heartedness. However, if this is only something that you grasp with the comprehension of your mind and heart, you will not become truly moved by this, except in a temporary and passing manner. In other words, it will only be external lip service, and not from the very inner depths of your heart, that you are actually broken hearted in truth. If that is the case, then you can easily fall back into evil, Heaven forbid, without a doubt.

It is regarding this that the Sages of blessed memory stated,¹⁵ “The wicked are full of remorse.” This is because their repentance is only temporary, after which they revert to the pursuit of the whims of their hearts, and are constantly in a state of regret. The Holy One, blessed is He, does not accept that kind of returnee, for he falsely deludes himself in his soul. On the contrary, such people are pushed away and rejected and continually descend, to the point that they can never repent, Heaven forbid.

Summary: The lowliness that is brought about by comprehension is only temporary, and it is likely that he will revert to his evil ways. In contrast, the lowliness that comes from higher than grasp and comprehension will cause him to fear even permissible things, such as profiting in his business. He will therefore distance himself from any kind of excess, even in permissible matters.

¹⁵ Tanya, Ch. 11; Reishit Chochmah, Yirah, Ch. 3; Shevet U’Musar, Ch. 25

Twelve

Now, notwithstanding all the above, there is no obligation upon the penitent to involve himself in fasting or other forms of self-flagellation. He need not walk around with his head bowed externally, or present himself with the appearances that he is in a state of broken-heartedness. For, as we previously explained, the primary root of true repentance is in the heart. In other words, the Holy One, blessed is He, tells him, “Give Me your heart and your eyes, and it is through this that I will know that you truly desire to return to Me,” so to speak. (This is like the dictum,¹⁶ “The Merciful One desires the heart.”)

Similarly, it is known that our Sages of blessed memory stated¹⁷ that even if one were to fast one-hundred fasts, this would not accomplish a rectification of his soul to the same extent as a truly broken and contrite heart, even if only once. (An example of this is given and explained at length in Shaar HaTeshuvah, Vol. 3, Ch. 6¹⁸ regarding the verse,¹⁹ “A rebuke enters deeper into a man of understanding, than a hundred lashes into a fool.” Study that chapter well.)

Therefore, there is no obligation upon you to conduct yourself externally in the aforementioned manners or to act as a recluse. On the contrary, you have an obligation to rejoice over the fact that you have returned from your wayward path

¹⁶ Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 106b and Rashi there. Sefer Chassidim 530.

¹⁷ Talmud Bavli, Brachot 7a.

¹⁸ Derech Chaim, translated as The Path of Life, Chapter 6.

to the straight and good path, and that you have escaped from the grip of death and have come to life. Nevertheless, you must be cautious at all times not to exalt yourself in your heart, Heaven forbid, or to engage in any kind of excessive idle chatter.

Additionally, you should take great care to be of lowly spirit before all men, even those who are lesser than you in stature. In other words, you should contemplate the truth in your soul and recognize how others are better and more upright than you. Then, even if you are scorned, persecuted or cursed beyond measure, you will accept it all with love, as atonement for your sins.

In addition, take great care not fall into gluttony or drunkenness whatsoever, Heaven forbid. The only exception to this is on the holiday meals which are specified times of rejoicing, because the meals enjoyed on the holidays are a positive commandment-*Mitzvah*. Therefore, it is permissible increase your consumption of food and drink slightly at such times.

However, you are to distance yourself completely from any kind of frivolity or scoffing under all circumstances, as mentioned above. You should therefore make sure that you are in good company, by pursuing friends who are good and upright Jews who fear *HaShem*, and you should distance yourself completely from bad and wicked people. This is as

¹⁹ Proverbs 17:10

stated,²⁰ “Happy is the man who has not walked in the council of the wicked.”

Summary: A broken heart is better than a hundred fasts. Additionally, not only should he not conduct himself in a manner of self-flagellation, but on the contrary, he should rejoice that he has returned to *HaShem*, and he should be humble and contrite.

²⁰ Psalms 1:1

Thirteen

It states in Psalms,²¹ “My sin is before me always.” Now, King David, peace be upon him, said this verse in order to inform and teach us the ways of true repentance. That is, one must never turn his attention away from thinking about his repentance over his sins. Rather, he should place it on his heart always, as if his sin is truly right before him at every moment. In this manner he will always truly have a broken heart.

It is therefore obligatory for a true penitent to conduct himself in this manner, and not to distract his attention from the matter of his sins whatsoever. He must keep this in mind even when he is in the marketplace or otherwise engaged in his occupations. Even at times that everyone else is rejoicing, such as the rejoicing of Shabbat and festivals, it is nonetheless incumbent upon him to contemplate and place it upon his heart that he is lower and lesser than everyone else. He should make a true accounting of his soul, and realize that he is a much greater sinner than others, to the point that there is literally no comparison at all. If you do this in truth, you will come to the ultimate sense of lowliness and bitterness, and you will come to the ultimate depth of broken-heartedness and contrition.

Then, because you truly recognizes your true stature and lowly place, you will be despicable in your own eyes, and

²¹ Psalms 51:5

HaShem will turn to you and gather you in to Himself with His right hand, which draws one close.²² This is as stated,²³ “Your right hand is outstretched to accept penitents.” This refers specifically to those who truly and consistently are in a state of repentance, without being distracted from their repentance whatsoever.

Summary: The penitent must keep his sins before him constantly, even on Shabbat and other joyous occasions. He must keep his sin before him to the extent that he is constantly embittered in his soul over this.

²² Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 107b.

²³ Liturgy of the closing-*Ne'ilah* prayer of *Yom Kippur*.

Fourteen

It is for the above reasons that the Sages of blessed memory stated,²⁴ “One should spend his entire life in a state of repentance.” The explanation of this is that he should be thinking about repentance on a constant and daily basis. He should not just shed some tears and be momentarily aroused, but then immediately turn his heart back to matters of the world, such as his business.

For, if he only repents in such a manner, then it is likely that he will return to his ruination and fall back into the evil ways of his wayward heart, Heaven forbid. It is clearly observable that many people stumble in this, and in truth, this is almost equal to one who says, “I will sin and then repent.”²⁵ It is regarding such people that the Sages of blessed memory stated that,²⁶ “The wicked are filled with remorse,” for they do not truly desire to repent and return.

Rather, the root and primary aspect of a true penitent is that he makes a very strong decision and commitment in his heart not to be distracted from his repentance whatsoever, in any way. This commitment comes from a true arousal, that he is moved in the very depths of his heart specifically, and it is something constant in him at all times and at every hour, because he does not wish to change from this decision ever, Heaven forbid.

²⁴ Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 153a.

²⁵ Mishnah Yoma 8:9

²⁶ Tanya, Ch. 11; Reishit Chochmah, Yirah, Ch. 3; Shevet U'Musar, Ch. 25

“*HaShem* searches all hearts,”²⁷ and,²⁸ He “investigates the kidneys and the heart,” and he seeks only the light of truth that is at the very core of one’s heart. Thus, if you return to *HaShem* in truth, and from the depth of your heart, *HaShem* will send his assistance from His Holy Place,²⁹ and will certainly receive you with His outstretched right arm,³⁰ as mentioned above.

Summary: The true penitent must spend all his days in repentance, and not merely a momentary temporary arousal to repent. If he truly repents from the depths of his heart, then his repentance will certainly be accepted.

²⁷ Chronicles I 28:9

²⁸ Jeremiah 11:20

²⁹ Paraphrase of Psalms 20:3

³⁰ Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 107b.

Fifteen

Now, the primary root and intention of repentance in general is in order to rectify your soul. That is, its purpose is to rectify any blemishes that you may have caused on your soul which is formed³¹ “in the image of God.” For when one causes blemishes to his soul, then he enters a state of spiritual death and severs the ropes that bond him³² to his Godly soul. That is, he severs himself from the source of his soul Above in Godliness, so that he does not derive any Godly vitality in his soul below, which is manifest in his body. This is as stated,³³ “That soul shall utterly be cut off.” However, through repentance you accomplish that,³⁴ “The spirit shall return to God.”

The explanation of this is that your soul and spirit return to their root and to the source of life, He who is the life of all living beings, the Essence of the Infinite Light of *HaShem*, blessed is He. We thus find that, through repentance, you leave a state of spiritual death to embrace Godly life, and your soul becomes enlivened with Godly vitality, literally like the physical revival of the dead. This is as stated,³⁵ “As I live, says The Lord *HaShem*: ‘I have no desire in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked return from his way and live; Return, O’ return, from your evil ways,

³¹ Genesis 1:27

³² Deuteronomy 32:9

³³ Numbers 15:31

³⁴ Ecclesiastes 12:7

³⁵ Ezekiel 33:11

for why shall you die, O' house of Israel?"” Similarly, it states,³⁶ “‘Have I any desire at all that the wicked should die?’ says The Lord *HaShem*, ‘do I not rather desire that he should return from his ways, and live?’

Thus, it must be understood that this is the total purpose of the Torah of man,³⁷ while he is still in this world. That is, the first thing that every penitent (*Ba'al Teshuvah*) must realize, believe, and have complete faith in, is that through true repentance he will merit eternal life. In other words, he will leave the imprisonment of the body which is the death of his soul, and he will cleave instead to the life of his soul, which is bound up with the source of life, the Essence of the Infinite Light of *HaShem*, blessed is He.

This is qualitatively comparable to a physical revival of the dead, literally. Subsequently, you must therefore rejoice and be extremely glad-hearted and you should delight and be joyful in your soul over the fact that you have left the state of death and evil and have come into a state of life and goodness. This is like the verse,³⁸ “See I have set before you this day life and good and death and evil.” It is this joy that is the primary sign for the true penitent to know that his repentance is true to its depth.

Summary: The blemishes cause death to the Godly soul, but repentance causes the “revival of the dead” and

³⁶ Ezekiel 18:23

³⁷ Numbers 19:14

³⁸ Deuteronomy 30:15

enlivens him with eternal life. He should greatly rejoice in this.

Sixteen

It is for the above reasons that we find that many books that instruct one in fear of *HaShem*, such as the works of *Mussar*, instruct the penitent to give charity to the poor. They instruct him to, at the very least, give charity on Friday before the Shabbat, as well as the day before the new month (*Rosh Chodesh*). For by means of giving charity and doing kind deeds to the poor, you literally enliven the soul of the poor, physically as well as spiritually. Because of this you will thereby merit true life. That is, by doing so, you merit to be drawn out of the spiritual death of your soul and for your soul to be illuminated with Godly light and vitality.

This is similar to what we find regarding a murderer, who is obligated to be punished with the death penalty, because that which he perpetrated should be done to him.³⁹ However, the same is true of the opposite, which is that when you enliven the soul of another person, you too merit life, as mentioned above. It is regarding this that it states,⁴⁰ “Charity delivers one from death.”

The explanation of this is that, charity enlivens and saves a person from physical death and nullifies all types of judgments, including the penalty of death, Heaven forbid. Charity likewise has the same effect spiritually, in that it will literally save you from spiritual death, so that your soul will not be cut off from its source, Heaven forbid. On the contrary,

³⁹ Exodus 21:12

⁴⁰ Proverbs 10:2, 11:4

its effect is that your soul will merit to return to be bound with its source and root.

Therefore, you must establish it as a fixed law in your conduct to give charity at the aforementioned propitious times, and in addition to this, you should fast on those days. The reason for the fasting is that it will help minimize your fat and blood, the abundance of which was derived from the physical pleasures you previously indulged in, all of which were motivated by your evil passions and lusts from the alien fires. Because of them you became attached to the three completely impure husks of evil (*Kelipot*) from which you must now detach yourself completely.

The general principle is that specifically through physical fasting, a person breaks his physical body, but causes rectification to the blemishes of his soul. That is, he repairs the blemishes that he caused in his soul, which is in the “Image of God,” and rectifies each sin to which he succumbed, and each evil lust that he experienced while in the actual act of sin. Thus, when you do the actual physical act of giving charity on the propitious days and times, on which you are also fasting and breaking your physicality, then you are causing a complete repair of that which you blemished. Through this your soul will become enlivened with Godly vitality from the very source of life itself, as mentioned above.

Summary: Just as a pauper is physically saved from death by means of charity, in the same manner by means of giving charity in general, and specifically on propitious days

of fasting and self-flagellation, a person repairs the blemishes of his soul and merits spiritual life and vitality.

Seventeen

We already explained before (in chapters six and seven) that there are two primary aspects to the root of repentance (*Teshuvah*). The first is the aspect of repentance in the thoughts of the mind and the desires of the heart. The second is the aspect of repentance in action, to actually desist from sin. We also previously explained (in chapters eight and nine) that at the root of repentance is the rectification of one's eyes, for the eyes are the intermediaries of sin.

To further explain this, it is understood that the aspect of repentance in the thoughts of the mind and the desires of the heart are impossible without a rectification of the eyes. That is, it is only possible to accomplish the primary rectification of thought and desire if one actually closes their eyes from gazing at any evil. It is regarding this that it states,⁴¹ "Do not stray after your hearts and after your eyes."

In other words, the true penitent (*Ba'al Teshuvah*) is obligated to utterly close his eyes and not allow them to gaze at anything that will arouse his lusts or anything evil or forbidden, even in only a passing fashion. It goes without saying that it is utterly forbidden for him to gaze at such things intentionally.

To clarify, even if you do not feel any desire in your heart whatsoever, and yet you do not remove your eyes from gazing, even if only from a distance, nevertheless, because

⁴¹ Numbers 15:39

you intend to gaze and do not close your eyes or turn them away, this is considered intentional, literally. It is so simple that it goes without saying, that under no circumstance should you intentionally contemplate such things in your mind, for this no different than intentionally gazing.

If you do so, there is no doubt that you will be brought to evil thoughts and desires and your heart will be roused with lust, after which you will descend to be brought to act on your lusts, Heaven forbid. It is regarding this that the Sages of blessed memory stated,⁴² “The eye sees and the heart lusts, and in the end, he will be brought to action,” (for they are the two intermediaries of sin).

This is similar to what was stated by Iyov,⁴³ “I have made a covenant with my eyes, how then shall I contemplate upon a maiden?” Similarly, the teaching of our Sages, of blessed memory, is well known,⁴⁴ that whoever becomes accustomed to intentionally gazing upon the beauty of women will ultimately fall into actual sin, Heaven forbid.

You must therefore specifically distance yourself completely from any gathering places where women gather alone and there are no men present. You must guard your soul against such places and distance yourself completely from them. You certainly should not fraternize or mingle with women whatsoever and should not converse them, but rather, avert your eyes completely and flee, so that you should not

⁴² Rashi to Numbers 15:39; Talmud Bavli, Brachot 24a.

⁴³ Job 31:1

⁴⁴ Talmud Bavli, Nedarim 20a.

become aroused with any lustful thoughts or desires in your heart, Heaven forbid. Even when you are at work or in the marketplace, take great care not to enter into discussion with women, even small talk. Rather, if you must, you should restrict your interactions to business only and nothing more.

Now, the above also applies to women, especially those who frequent markets or work in them etc. They too must carefully guard their souls in this matter and minimize all conversation and fraternization with men and boys. For as stated before, this is something that will cause illness to their children, may the Merciful One save us.

Summary: Repentance in the thoughts of the mind and in the desires of the heart is utterly dependent upon guarding one's sight, and abstaining from gazing at anything forbidden whatsoever. Even gazing from afar at something that will arouse one's lusts is damaging and should be completely avoided.

Eighteen

The aspect of repentance in action refers to actually desisting from sin. In truth, this is the primary aspect of repentance on a Biblical level. This is as stated,⁴⁵ “Let the wicked one forsake his way and the man of iniquity his thoughts; and let him return to *HaShem*, and He will have compassion upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” As previously explained, it is specifically through this kind of repentance, that the Holy One, blessed be He, pardons and forgives for all transgressions.

Now, the obligation referred to here is to desist in actuality from any emissions of wasteful seed, Heaven forbid, and certainly from more serious transgressions. In addition, a person is obligated to accept upon himself not to return to such sins and he must regret his past transgressions. He should accept this commitment upon himself while reciting the confession of *Al Cheit*,⁴⁶ as previously mentioned. That is, while reciting the words, “For the sins that we have transgressed etc,” you should pour out your soul and say the words sincerely with all your heart, and you should verbally accept upon yourself each of the four Biblical death penalties. That is, you should accept the correct death penalty that applies to each of the specific sins that you sinned, which each person is well aware of in their own soul.

⁴⁵ Isaiah 55:7

⁴⁶ The extended confession of the *Yom Kippur* liturgy.

Moreover, when you recall each particular sin that you transgressed, you are obligated to verbally specify them during your confession. You must then beg forgiveness and atonement from *HaShem*, blessed is He, over your past misdeeds and accept upon yourself to never again turn to sin, Heaven forbid. This is the primary aspect of true repentance, through which *HaShem*, blessed is He, will surely and truly forgive and pardon and your repentance will be received with love and true desire from Above.

Summary: The primary aspect of repentance (*Teshuvah*) is leaving sin in actuality. He must sincerely regret his sins while reciting the confession, and he must earnestly pour out his soul while confessing to his specific transgressions.

Nineteen

Our sages of blessed memory stated,⁴⁷ “One who comes in order to make himself pure, they help him from Above; one who comes in order to make himself impure, they provide him with an opening to do so.” The explanation of this is that one who come to purify himself, refers to one who comes to purify his heart of all its various evils, by means of true repentance. If he does so, then the Holy One, blessed is He, helps him with immeasurable salvation and goodness. That is to say that they bestow abundant good thoughts upon him from Above, through which his heart will automatically be broken within him in truth and sincerity. Through this he will automatically desist and abstain from evil with the ultimate distance and with constancy.

In contrast, the opposite is also true, Heaven forbid. That is, if a person comes to make himself impure with unclean, extraneous or evil thoughts, Heaven forbid, then the gates of impurity are opened to him from Above. That is, he is caused to fall into all manner of abundant extraneous and evil thoughts that will cause his heart to turn to all manner of evil, Heaven forbid.

Moreover, he does not receive any good thoughts from Above, such as thoughts that will turn his heart towards repentance. Thus, his soul becomes lost to destruction in the depths of the abyss, and to the depths of the grave of spiritual

⁴⁷ Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 104a; Yoma 38b

death, Heaven forbid. Primarily, this occurs with one who has never repented in his life and who not only sinned, but caused others to sin.

Summary: One who returns in order to purify his heart of evil is provided with assistance and given thoughts of repentance and a broken heart. One who sins and causes others to sin is provided with the very opposite, extraneous and evil thoughts which will bring his soul to utter destruction.

Twenty

Now, a person who truly and willfully repented, but then afterwards returns to his sins, falling once again into the very same sins, Heaven forbid; this is called a deceitful penitent, or a false penitent. It is regarding such a person that the Sages of blessed memory stated,⁴⁸ “The wicked are filled with remorse.” To further clarify, those who only repent temporarily, but then return and fall again into their sinful ways, are considered the same as the completely wicked. This is because this indicates that they did not truly repent completely and in truth in the first place.

This is compared to “A person who ritually purifies himself in a ritual pool (*Mikvah*) while holding the carcass of an impure animal in his hand.”⁴⁹ Such “purification” cannot be considered to accomplish any purity whatsoever, because he is holding onto his impurities with his hands. It is exactly the same regarding to these kinds of penitents. That is, their repentance is not accepted before the Holy One, blessed is He, and it is not even considered that they repented at all. This is because they continue to hold on to their impurities even while they supposedly are repenting.

Nevertheless, there is a balm and remedy even for this kind deceitful penitent, so that he may be cured of his sickness. Moreover, there certainly is much more hope for

⁴⁸ Tanya, Ch. 11; Reishit Chochmah, Yirah, Ch. 3; Shevet U’Musar, Ch. 25

⁴⁹ Rashi to Lamentations 3:41; Rambam laws of repentance 2:3; Talmud Bavli Taanit 16a.

him, than for someone who never repented altogether, who continues to sin and to cause others to sin. For as mentioned above, the people who never repent and who instead always follow the whims of their hearts, are involved completely and constantly in evil. They have no self-restraint at all and do whatever they desire, to the point that they succumb to utter abomination, Heaven forbid, with nothing to stop their souls. Because of this, they automatically are drawn after every evil lust, may the Merciful One save us, to the point that there is no hope for them at all, because they are completely cast aside from the Holy One, blessed is He.

However, those who stumble and fall into a transgression or an evil lust, God forbid, but then return and repent, arouse a certain amount of mercy from Above. They therefore receive assistance from Above, so that they might truly repent, so that they not be ashamed to stumble eternally. This is because, at the very least, they do indeed have thoughts of repentance on a constant basis, only that on rare occasion, they could not overcome their evil inclination and break their spirit, to restrain themselves from the evil lust, God forbid.

In this case, *HaShem*, blessed is He, who investigates the heart and the kidneys, will cause them to be tormented with bitter afflictions from their offspring, health or livelihood, until their wayward heart and spirit is broken within them, truly and sincerely. Then they will be able to fully repent completely and truly and will no longer return to their sinful ways and never again fall or stumble, God forbid. Through this, the Holy One, blessed is He, completely

forgives and absolves them of all the sins of their soul, as it states,⁵⁰ “Suffering cleanses a person.”

Summary: One who repents only temporarily is a deceitful penitent. However, when he is afflicted in his offspring, health or livelihood, his heart will be broken within him and he will repent fully and with sincerity and truth.

⁵⁰ Talmud Bavli, Brachot 5a.

Twenty-One

Now, the aforementioned afflictions of one's offspring, health or livelihood, actually come from the attribute of *HaShem's* abundant goodness and great kindness. Moreover, He only extends this great goodness to those whose repentance He truly desires. This refers to those people who have tasted the bitter taste and have truly repented, at least once. Thus, by means of these afflictions their hearts become softened and broken within them in truth and they fully return to *HaShem*.

However, those people who have never actually or truly repented even once, even if they occasionally have a momentary thought of repentance; it is temporary and only a fleeting lip service. They then immediately return to the wayward ways of the whims of their heart and return to all their wicked abominations, Heaven forbid. In this circumstance, the Holy One, blessed is He, does not desire their repentance whatsoever. Moreover, not only does He not afflict them with the aforementioned afflictions, but on the contrary, he sends them abundant success and wealth in all matters of this physical world.

Everyone can identify the signs for this and know the truth of it in their own souls. In other words, if one truly and sincerely repents, then his heart will be broken within him, and he will be lowly and truly and sincerely humbled before all people, even those who are of lower stature than himself, as previously explained (in chapter twelve). He will therefore automatically utterly distance himself from all evil.

Moreover, although on rare occasion he may enter into battle with his evil inclination, he will easily be able to stand up against it and overpower his inclination, conquering and vanquishing it completely.

Now, he might actually succumb and fall to sin, for any number of reasons. For example, a person who remains unmarried for a number of years, may succumb to sin. Similarly, one who must associate with empty and vain people will be constantly pressured by his associates to join them in their various gatherings, where he will be surrounded by gluttony or drunkenness. Because of this, he will automatically be drawn to succumb to actual sin, may the Merciful One save us.

However, even if this does occur to him, and he does indeed succumb to the act of sin, it will only happen to him once. This is because he will immediately regret it and will immediately be filled with remorse over his past transgressions, and he will literally mourn for his soul and be pained in the depths of his heart over it. He will then increase his fasting and truly repent completely, committing himself to never again fall into such traps.

He will then guard himself from all the aforementioned causes that brought him to stumble, so that he never again will be caused to succumb to actual sin, Heaven forbid, may the Merciful One save us. When the Holy One, blessed is He, who examines the heart and sees the truth, sees that he truly desires to completely repent with total sincerity, then *HaShem* will forgive and absolve him of his sin from Above.

Now, there is a sign for the opposite of the above, and each person can identify this sign within themselves. When the aforementioned person stumbles in a single sin and his heart is then pulled further in, to sin or minimize his observance in other areas, then this is like the dictum of the Sage of blessed memory,⁵¹ “One transgression brings another transgression.”

In other words, he will continue to fall to the point that he pursues his lusts, descending into even more grave transgressions and fulfilling them in actuality, until he is capable of transgressing every negative prohibition of the Torah, Heaven forbid, may the Merciful One save us. He will thus be caused to fall to such a point that he will no longer ever be able to repent. This is like the statement of our Sages of blessed memory,⁵² “In the direction that a person wishes to go, that is the direction that he is taken.”

Summary: One who truly repents, even if he stumbles, will return to his repentance. However, one who sins and causes others to sin is not granted the opportunity to repent, even by means of affliction. On the contrary, he is granted physical beneficence specifically in order to destroy him and one sin will lead him to further sin.

⁵¹ Mishnah Avot 4:2

⁵² Talmud Bavli, Makot 10b.

Twenty-Two

Now, in general, the conduct of a true penitent, *Ba'al Teshuvah*, should be as follows: You must awaken and arise from your bed in the early morning. Immediately upon rising, you should take care to remind yourself of all of the sins that you transgressed from the moment you came into the world until today. This is as King David, peace be upon him, stated,⁵³ “My sin is before me always.” In addition, you should recite Psalm Fifty-One from the depths of your heart, and should particularly focus when you recite the verse,⁵⁴ “Wash me thoroughly of my iniquity.”

Even if you did not transgress any severe transgressions, you must still recite Psalms Fifty-One, specifically. For, even a person who only caused blemish with thoughts of licentiousness or thoughts of other disgraceful acts, God forbid, should understand that this too is in fact quite severe. For it is regarding this that the Torah states,⁵⁵ “For all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth etc.,” (which was the reason for the flood in the times of Noah).

Moreover, this also applies to a person who only sinned in this regard when he was still a minor, before entering the age of obligation in the *mitzvot*-commandments (*Bar Mitzvah* or *Bat Mitzvah*). It therefore certainly applies after one has reached the age of thirteen, at which time he

⁵³ Psalms 51:6

⁵⁴ Ibid 51:4

⁵⁵ Genesis 6:12

becomes responsible to fulfill the commandments and accept the consequences of his transgressions. As such, you must fast according to the prescribed fasts and should recite the aforementioned Psalm on a daily basis.

Moreover, you should recite the lengthy *Al Cheit* confession every week on Mondays and Thursdays, as well as on the day before the new month (*Rosh Chodesh*) during the Mincha prayer. At these times you should recall all your sins and beg forgiveness and atonement from *HaShem*, blessed is He.

Summary: The conduct of the true penitent is that he is to recall all of his sins and recite Psalm Fifty-One daily. When reciting the verse,⁵⁶ “Wash me thoroughly of my iniquity,” he is to recall and repent even for sins that he transgressed before the age of becoming obligated in the commandments (*Bar Mitzvah*).

⁵⁶ Ibid 51:4

Twenty-Three

You should recite psalms every day before praying. The reason for this is that the words of Psalms shed light on the matter of repentance very clearly. When you pray, you should do so from within the prayer book, with great lowliness and humility. When you stand before *HaShem*, blessed is He, in prayer, you should do so with great shame and disgrace. You should therefore recite each and every word from within the prayer book (and not by heart) with great lowliness and true subjugation from the inner point of the depths of your heart. You should truly praise and give thanks to *HaShem* that you have merited to come before *HaShem*, and that you have not been cast aside to be left in evil, Heaven forbid.

If you pray in the above manner, then you will be truly joyous when you recite the verses of song (*Psukei D'Zimra*), which is the section that is between the *Baruch She'amar* prayer (Blessed is He who spoke), the recital of the *Shema* (Listen Israel) and the standing prayer of eighteen blessings (*Shmonah Esrei*). However, while reciting the prayers that precede the *Baruch She'amar* prayer, you should be in a state of lowliness and humility over your sins and transgressions.

This is as our Sages of blessed memory stated,⁵⁷ “One may only stand to pray from an approach of gravity and submission.” That is, one is to be in a state of lowliness and subjugation over the sins of his youth, which each person is

⁵⁷ Talmud Bavli, Brachot 30b.

well aware of within themselves. Moreover, you should not falsely delude yourself in this, nor should you see this to be a trifling matter in yourself, Heaven forbid.

Summary: He is to recite Psalms before praying, and while praying, he is to recite each word from within the prayer book, with lowliness and humility.

Twenty-Four

When you reach the standing prayer of eighteen blessings (*Shmonah Esrei*), remind yourself of all of your sins, and beg for forgiveness and atonement upon yourself. More particularly, when you reach the blessing of, “Return us, our Father – *HaShiveinu*,” specifically to the words, “Return us in complete repentance before You,” you should accept upon yourself to actually completely repent and return to *HaShem*. It is thus certain that *HaShem* will accept your request, for as the blessing concludes, “Blessed are You *HaShem*, who **desires** repentance.” Similarly, it is stated,⁵⁸ “Your right hand is outstretched to accept penitents.”

However, all of the above only applies to one who truly desires to repent and return, with sincerity. This is as stated,⁵⁹ “*HaShem* is close to all that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth.”

When you reach the blessing requesting healing – “*Refa’einu* – heal us” – your intention to *HaShem* should be that *HaShem* should heal all the ailments of your soul and all of the blemishes that you caused through your transgressions. For because of your transgressions you have caused blemishes to your soul, to the point of spiritual death. Because of this, even your Godly soul is unable to receive Godly vitality below in your soul, as previously explained at greater length.

⁵⁸ Liturgy of the closing-*Ne’ilah* prayer of *Yom Kippur*.

⁵⁹ Psalms 145:18

Thus, it is through repentance that you enliven your soul with Godly vitality. You must therefore beg *HaShem* to heal you from the ills of your soul, so that your soul does not die a spiritual death, to be cut off from its source, Heaven forbid, as previously explained.

When you reach the blessing of “*V’Lamalsheeneem* – Let there be no hope for the informers,” you should focus your intention against all of accusing angels that were created by your sins and which now serve to draw forth negative decrees upon you from Above, Heaven forbid. For with each of your sinful deeds you created an accusatory angel, who is allowed to punish you in your physical livelihood or cause bodily suffering, may the Merciful One protect us. This is as stated,⁶⁰ “Your own wickedness shall correct you.” Therefore, during this blessing you should beg *HaShem* to remove all these accusatory prosecutions from upon yourself, and from upon the entire Jewish people.

When you recite the blessing of “*Shma Koleinu* – Hear our voice,” you should say it with extremely great intention and from the very depths of the heart. Your intention before *HaShem*, blessed is He, is that *HaShem* should hear your prayer and awaken His abundant mercies to receive your prayer with desire and mercy. If you do so, it is certain that *HaShem* will hear your prayer, as the blessing concludes, “For You listen to the prayers of every mouth,” which certainly applies to a person whose heart is broken within him over the sins of his youth.

Thus, if you are repenting and praying to *HaShem*, the Holy One, blessed is He, will assist and support you from Above, so that you can truly come close to the Holy One, blessed is He. *HaShem* will certainly accept you with desire and will watch over you constantly with His Divine providence and open eyes, even your property and all your physical matters. This is as stated,⁶¹ “Let him return to *HaShem* and He will have mercy upon him.” That is, *HaShem* will protect you from all misfortunes so that they will not come upon you, may the Merciful One protect us.

However, you must take great care that the blessing of “*Shma Koleinu* – Hear our voice” be recited from the innermost depths of your heart and with the bitterness of your soul. This is as we find concerning Chanah, about whom it states,⁶² “And she was bitter in her soul and she prayed unto *HaShem* and wept and cried... and Chanah spoke in her heart...”

When you reach the *Nefilat Apayim* (“Falling on one’s face”) confessional supplication, you should lower and humble yourself even further and accept upon yourself any penance, including all four forms of the death penalty meted out by the courts, as specified in Torah, just as you should do during the nightly confession, along with the *Shma* recital before retiring to bed.

⁶⁰ Jeremiah 2:19

⁶¹ Isaiah 55:7

⁶² Samuel I 1:10-13

Summary: He is to have the aforementioned intentions during the prayers, and specifically during the blessings of “Return us – *Hashiveinu*,” “Heal us – *Refa’einu*,” “Let there be no hope for the informers – *V’Lamalsheeneem*,” “Hear our voice – *Shma Koleinu*,” as well as during the *Nefilat Apayim* confessional supplication.

Twenty-Five

After your prayers you should learn some Torah, whatever it is. You may even learn one portion of the *Chumash* (The five books of the Torah), or one chapter of the Prophets (*Nevi'im*) or Scriptures (*Ketuvim*). Alternatively, you may learn a chapter or even half a chapter of Mishnah or the Code of Jewish Law, in the section on daily life entitled “*Orach Chayim* – The Way of Life.” You should review whatever you learn several times.

If you are a scholar who is capable of understanding the intricacies of the Talmud with greater depth of intellect, you must set aside specific times for Torah study. You should study the *Beit Yosef* commentary on the Tur, as well as the *Shulchan Aruch* code of Jewish Law, along with the commentaries of the *Acharonim*. You should do this on a daily basis, every morning.

In addition, you should pick one day out of the week and study all night until the morning, and do so on a regular weekly basis. During that nightly study you should learn the sections of the Zohar that are words of reproof and ethics (*Mussar*), as well as the Gate of Repentance in *Reishit Chochmah*.

If you fast until after midday, until the first hour of the afternoon, that is adequate to be considered a complete fast. However, when you do eat, you should not do so with lust as if you are an animal. Moreover, you should take great care not to overeat at all, but should only eat the amount necessary

for the health and wellbeing of your body. In other words, you should not eat in order to take any delight or pleasure from it, nor should you eat rich or fatty foods. Rather, you should only eat light foods, such as dairy and bread. In this way you will not fill your belly with coarse and fatty foods that will cause you to fall back into the ways of your open and wayward heart, Heaven forbid.

Summary: After prayers, he is to study Chumash, the Prophets or Scriptures, Mishnah and Jewish Law, or *Reishit Chochmah* or the Zohar, according to the prescription above. He is to set aside one night of the week to learn Torah the entire night. If he fasts until the first hour after noon, it is considered a complete fast.

Twenty-Six

To add to the above, know that if one consumes coarse or fatty foods to the point that he fills his stomach with them, it is quite possible for him to subsequently succumb to lewd behavior in actuality, Heaven forbid. (This is as our Sages of blessed memory stated,⁶³ “Filling the stomach leads to being filled with sin, as the verse states,⁶⁴ ‘When they were fed and became full, they were sated and their hearts were lifted, and they forgot Me.’”) This is because when a person eats in abundance, his heart becomes very coarse and gross and his body becomes more physical. It heats up his body and he sweats more and becomes literally like an animal. This is the very opposite of a heart that is pure, humble, and lowly.

The above certainly applies to those people who invest in pleasuring themselves with the consumption of many delightful foods and all manner of delicious delicacies, without minimizing their consumption at all. Moreover, they eat with lust, desire and great yearning and are completely controlled by these pleasures. In this case, their bodies become so physical that they become corpulent and fat, as it states,⁶⁵ “You became fat, you became thick, you became gross etc.” Because of this, his heart becomes completely closed and insensitive, to the point that it is as if he has a heart

⁶³ Talmud Bavli, Brachot 32a.

⁶⁴ Hosea 13:6

⁶⁵ Deuteronomy 32:15

of stone. The automatic result of this behavior is that he will never be able to consider repentance, all of the days of his life.

Therefore, every penitent (*Ba'al Teshuvah*) should take great care to only eat a little bit and only what is adequate to sustain his health. Moreover, he is not to indulge in food with the heat of lustful desire, so that he is not caused to descend into the heat of other evil lusts, Heaven forbid. In addition, he should guard himself against delighting in his food, in the sense that he shouldn't fill his table with many different types of courses, but should rather eat simply. For, a true penitent must distance himself from all of the above, and take care not to increase his fat and blood due to his consumptions. On the contrary, he must minimize his fat and his blood by fasting and he must rectify the heat of his evil lusts which became increased on account of all his sins, Heaven forbid.

Summary: He must take great care when it comes to the consumption of food so that he does not become coarse. He must be attentive both to the quantities that he consumes, and he must also avoid taking any great pleasure in food. Moreover, he should eat with restraint and moderation, and minimize his fat and blood.

Twenty-Seven

Now, it is possible for there to be another cause, one that is quite common, that causes many penitents to stumble and fall back into their evil ways. Moreover, in many circumstances they can become even worse than they were before in their evil deeds, Heaven forbid. This is much worse than the pleasure derived from food, which is called gluttony. I am referring here to the consumption of strong alcohol, which heats up and burns the heart.

The consumption of strong alcoholic beverages causes the body to become heated, and when one consumes even just a small amount more than the proper measure, his heart can become lit up like a flame burning with all manner of evil lusts, may the Merciful One save us. In short, the consumption of strong alcohol burns the heart and the soul, for it heats up the blood and completely removes a person from rational behavior.

It can even cause tremendous damage to those who are free of sin. For they too, will become quite heated because of this, and will be caused to descend and fall from their lofty stature. It removes all intellect from them and removes them from a state of fear of God. Because of this, they will come to all manner of negative traits, such as anger, arguments, altercations and arrogance, all of which are extremely hated by the Holy One, blessed is He. This is something that is mentioned in numerous verses, and it is explained in many

holy books that a drunkard is open to every type of severe transgression and vice, Heaven forbid.

Therefore, every penitent (*Ba'al Teshuvah*) should guard himself against drinking hard liquor, including strong beer. Certainly, he should not drink any strong alcohol at all, because then he will develop a habit of it, and over time will come to drink it even before meals. Therefore, he should avoid it completely, even for the *Kiddush* or *Havdalah* benedictions. He should instead use light wine or beer, but should not make *Kiddush* or *Havdalah* on strong liquor whatsoever.

Summary: He should guard himself against drinking any strong alcoholic beverages which will cause his body to become heated, and will cause his negative traits to flare, leading him to anger, belligerence or argument. He is not to utilize any strong alcohol for the *Kiddush* or *Havdalah* benedictions.

Twenty-Eight

Every penitent must guard himself against sleeping during the day immediately after having eaten. This is because the heat of the digestion of the food he ate will increase the heat of his blood and of his body, which can cause him to be brought to lustful thoughts or evil occurrences, as known, Heaven forbid. Therefore, you should take precaution not to sleep immediately after having eaten, but should rather wait an hour or more.

Moreover, this restraint will itself assist you in breaking your heart within yourself. This is because you will feel the coarseness and grossness of your heart, caused by the food that you ate, and you will feel the need to work on yourself with toil, due to your grossness. You should therefore greatly strengthen yourself to distance yourself from evil, both in deed and in thought, and you should work to fulfill the commandments and perform good deeds with a complete heart and with alacrity.

Now, it is explained in various works that one must eat for the sake of Heaven, and not to satisfy his lusts, and to recite the after-blessing with intention. That is, you should recite the blessing and the verse,⁶⁶ “And you shall eat and be satisfied, and bless *HaShem*...” By doing so, you thus recognize that it is *HaShem* who sustains you with food and livelihood, and in doing so, *HaShem* will therefore grant you

⁶⁶ Deuteronomy 8:10

abundant strength from the food you consume, specifically so that you will have great strength to serve *HaShem* by desisting from evil and doing good deeds, as said before.

Additionally, give charity to the poor immediately after concluding your meal and reciting the after-blessing, even if it is only a small amount. You should therefore always have a charity box in your house. This is a very great rectification for the soul, which rectifies it from all evil, may the Merciful One protect us. This is as stated,⁶⁷ “Whoever keeps the commandment shall know no evil thing.”

Moreover, we previously explained that charity saves a person from death, both physically and spiritually. Thus, you should take care to give charity at, at least two specific times every day. The first is before prayer, as King David, peace be upon him, said,⁶⁸ “I shall behold your face with charity.” The second is either before or after eating a meal.

Moreover, it is stated in the holy books⁶⁹ that by eating one’s meals he is able to complete the one-hundred blessings that one is to recite daily, by saying the blessings after eating. It is through this that his eating is done for the sake of *HaShem*, and by doing so, he is constantly reminded that he is the servant of *HaShem*.

Thus, you should have alacrity at all times in seeking out commandments to perform for the Holy One, blessed is He. For example, if you can assist a Torah scholar or perhaps

⁶⁷ Ecclesiastes 8:5

⁶⁸ Psalms 17:15; Talmud Bavli, Bava Basra 10a

⁶⁹ Shaarei Orah of Rabbi Yosef Gikatilla, Shaar 1; Shulchan Aruch of the Alter Rebbe 46:1.

take some time out from your business affairs to study Torah or attend a Torah lecture or perhaps to recite some Psalms, or the like.

The general principle is that you should take great care never to forget that you are the servant of *HaShem*. If you do this, then *HaShem*, who you serve, will assist and support you in your service of *HaShem*. This is as stated by the Sages of blessed memory,⁷⁰ “One who comes to purify himself receives assistance from Above,” as previously mentioned.

Another important matter that must be constantly recalled by all penitents and all who fear God, is to work with alacrity and good faith in the pursuit of your livelihood. In other words, you should not be idle (as idleness brings to lust, which brings to licentiousness and sin),⁷¹ nor should you be deceitful in any way at all, to any man or woman. One who derives benefit from the toil of his hands will be happy and it will be good for him,⁷² both in this world and the next.

Summary: He should guard himself from sleep during the day immediately after eating. He is to give charity prior to prayer and before eating a meal. He is to constantly remember that he is a servant of *HaShem*, and he is to have alacrity in his occupation. Happy is he who derives benefit from the toil of his hands.

⁷⁰ Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 104a; Yoma 38b.

⁷¹ Talmud Bavli, Ketubot 59b.

⁷² Psalms 128:2

