**Mediocre *Teshuva* and the *Teshuva* of the Mediocre**

**Based on a sicha by**

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***Teshuva* for the Few and *Teshuva* for the Many**

The concept of *teshuva* (repentance) bears a dual aspect. On the one hand, when *teshuva* is successfully completed, it can have an elitist tinge. As *Chazal* say, “In the place where *ba’alei teshuva* (penitents) stand, even the completely righteouscannot stand” (*Berakhot* 34b, *Sanhedrin* 99a). In this respect, *ba’alei teshuva* constitute a sort of spiritual aristocracy. And as *Chazal* say elsewhere, “I have seen the sons of heaven” – those who will bask in the Divine Presence in the World-to-Come – “and they are but few” (*Sukka* 45b). Presumably *ba’alei teshuva* are among these “sons of heaven,” few though they are.

On the other hand, *teshuva* has a very democratic, exoteric cast. It is necessary for all – as Kohelet declares, “For there is not one righteous man on earth who does only good and does not sin” (*Kohelet* 7:20) – and it is also accessible to all.

*Chazal* highlight a number of historical figures and events from the *Tanakh* in order to convey the message of the universality of *teshuva*. The *gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 103a-b) presents different views on how to evaluate the character of Menashe, the son of Chizkiyahu. Some consider him so dastardly that they include him in the short list of people who have no share in the World-to-Come. Others base their assessment on the accountin II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 33:12-19, which describes how, toward the end of his days, Menashe began to pray to God in his time of crisis. In light of this, one view in the *gemara* states, “He who asserts that Menashe has no portion in the World-to-Come weakens the hands [i.e., the resolve] of *ba’alei teshuva*”(103a). In an even more daring statement, the *gemara* (*Avoda Zara* 4b-5a) posits that from a certain ideal perspective the story of David and Bat-Sheva never ought to have occurred. Neither he nor she was destined for that kind of an encounter, and yet God caused the encounter to occur in order to establish a model of *teshuva* for all.

What is the nature of this model? First, there is a clear connection between *teshuva* and forgiveness: “The whole Israelite community and the stranger residing among them shall be forgiven, for it happened to the entire people through error” (*Bemidbar* 15:26). But beyond forgiveness, *teshuva* represents a leveling element. The Rambam speaks of the centrality and importance of *teshuva* as both an opportunity and an obligation deriving from the theme of free will that he had developed earlier:

Since free choice is given to all people, as explained, a person should always strive to do *teshuva* and to confess verbally for his sins, striving to cleanse his hands from sin in order that, upon dying as one who has done *teshuva*,[[2]](#footnote-2)he merit the life of the World-to-Come. (*Hilkhot Teshuva* 7:1)

The goal of attaining the status of “one who has done *teshuva*” and thereby meriting “the life of the World-to-Come” is not limited to a particular class or group, nor to those who are outstanding or deviant in some respect. It is a universal goal.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Thus there is, on the one hand, a category of *teshuva* that rings with aristocracy, and, on the other hand, a comprehensive, universal, even democratic category. It is to this duality that we will relate, particularly with regard to the relationship of *teshuva* to mediocrity. While the word “mediocrity” has a very pallid ring, if not an outright negative one, the equivalent word *beinoniyut* as it is used in *Chazal* and in traditional Jewish literature seems to have no such connotation. In fact, as the point of departure of his seminal work, the *Tanya*, R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi quotes a *baraita* that discusses the fate of a *beinoni*, a mediocre person (*Nidda* 30b). He goes on to quote a *gemara* in which one of the greatest of the *Amora’im* cites himself as an example of a *beinoni* (*Berakhot* 60b). Despite this, for our purposes, we will assume that a *beinoni* is no more than what the literal meaning of the word suggests: a middling, mediocre person.

It is particularly important to focus on the fate and the destiny of the *beinoni* during the Ten Days of Repentance. The *gemara* says:

Three books are opened in heaven on Rosh Ha-shana, one for the thoroughly wicked, one for the thoroughly righteous, and one for the *beinoni*. The thoroughly righteous are inscribed definitively in the book of life; the thoroughly wicked are inscribed definitively in the book of death; the *beinonim* remain suspended until Yom Kippur. If they deserve well, they are inscribed for life; if they do not deserve well, they are inscribed for death. (*Rosh Ha-shana* 16b)

According to this passage, the Ten Days of Repentance – the days of “Seek the Lord while He can be found, call to Him while He is near” (*Yeshayahu* 55:6) – represent the hour of decision for the *beinoni*. The obvious issues raised by this classification and categorization notwithstanding,[[4]](#footnote-4) we observe here an awareness of the significance of *teshuva*,specifically during this holy period, to the average person – the *beinoni*. As presumably all of us are amongst the *beinonim*, this subject is particularly timely.

**The Elitism of Purity**

Let us begin our analysis with a text that does not relate directly to *teshuva*, but which still relates to the central issue of maximalism and mediocrity.In the sixteenth chapter of *Mesillat Yesharim*, the Ramchal, R. Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, opens with a discussion of the quality of *tahara* (purity): “Purity entails the reparation of one’s heart and thoughts.” He goes on to clarify that *tahara* is purity of action and motive, to the point that one’s soul contains no impurity whatsoever that could serve to adulterate one’s heart and thoughts. He says that if one engages in a fundamentally positive action – perhaps even a mitzva – but there is even the slightest aspect of impurity within one’s motive or attitude, then one can no longer speak of that as *tahara*. “Thus,” he continues, “even if the impure motive plays only an insignificant part, the action to which it leads can no longer be absolutely pure.” The Ramchal then introduces an essential halakhic analogy:

In the same way that a meal-offering on the altar had to consist only of the finest flour that had been sifted thirteen times in order to remove from it all impurities (*Menachot* 76b), so should we offer on the altar of the divine will only the choicest deeds, wholly free from the slightest taint of impurity.

I do not say that all conduct which falls short of this standard is to be entirely discountenanced. God withholds his desserts from no one, and rewards each deed according to its worth. But I speak of perfect worship which is expected from those who truly love the Lord. It can be called perfect only when it is pure and is rendered for no reason except that of serving God.

Purity, says the Ramchal, cannot be partial; it must be completely and utterly pure. Just as before a meal-offering is brought to the altar it must be sifted thirteen times, ensuring that every impurity has been thoroughly removed, one must similarly achieve total purity in one’s person and in one’s actions in order to attain the quality of *tahara*. The Ramchal does not go so far as to say that in the absence of this total purity a person or an action cannot be deemed virtuous. Indeed, every person is rewarded for his good deeds in a manner that is commensurate with the nature of those deeds; a small impurity in the motive behind a particular action certainly does not nullify it altogether. But according to the Ramchal, that person or action cannot be considered truly pure.

Before assessing this seemingly elitist approach to self-perfection, it is important to provide some background information regarding the context in which the Ramchal’s statement appears. In its preface, *Mesillat Yesharim* cites a *baraita* of R. Pinchas ben Yair, which presents a scale of qualities and values in ascending order:

The knowledge of Torah leads to watchfulness, watchfulness to zeal, zeal to cleanness, cleanness to abstinence, abstinence to purity, purity to saintliness, saintliness to humility, humility to the fear of sin and the fear of sin to holiness. (*Avoda Zara* 20b)

Ramchal examines each of these qualities in order over the course of *Mesillat Yesharim*, defining its nature and character, outlining the modes of its implementation and warning of possible obstacles in the way of achieving it.

*Mesillat Yesharim* can be divided into two parts. Roughly speaking, the first half addresses the qualities that one must possess in order to be a *tzaddik*. In short, one must do what is expected of him and refrain from doing what he should not do. By contrast, the second half of the book is directed at one who aspires to be a *chasid* (pious person), defined by the Rambam as one who goes beyond the letter of the law in his deeds (*Hilkhot De’ot* 1:5). Thus, one could be defined as a *tzaddik* even if he was marked by a minor impurity, and even if he did not meet the spiritual standards that correspond to the physical *kashrut* standards of a meal-offering. But *tahara* goesbeyond the level of the *tzaddik*; it is a step on the way to becoming a *chasid*, a member of the spiritual elite. *Tahara* has no middle point, no spectrum; it is either pure or impure. The moment that the slightest imperfection exists, one has, in effect, missed the boat and cannot be regarded as a *tahor*.

One might very well be satisfied not to be among the elite, among those of whom the verse says, “Bring in My pious (*chasidai*), who made a covenant with Me over sacrifice!” (*Tehillim* 50:5). One might be content not to benefit from God’s special protection, as attested to by the verse, “He guards the steps of His pious (*chasidav*)”(*I Shemuel* 2:9). One might be a fine person, an upstanding Jew, at peace with his exclusion from the select few *chasidim* in our midst. Nevertheless, the tone and thrust of the *chasid*’s elitism is quite troubling, even depressing. Since one must be completely pure in order to be considered *tahor*,there is effectively no middle ground, no intermediate steps, no spectrum. This is an incredibly daunting prospect.

To some extent this notion is morally troubling as well. One might invest great effort in attempting to attain the level of *tahara*, only to slip up on some minor misdeed or impure intention, some peccadillo of thought or action. While this misstep may seem trifling, it is enough to disqualify one from the ranks of the pure. It is also distressing from a religious perspective, in terms of the world of *avodat Hashem*, that this classification should be so rigorous, so rigid – almost oppressive. Finally, the standard of perfection here is so high that it is likely to deter many people from pursuing *tahara* in the first place. They may reasonably argue that while *tahara* is attainable for the *Chafetz Chayim* and those of his ilk, it is far beyond their own grasp.

It is entirely understandable that the kind of total purity that the Ramchal discusses here indeed exists in certain areas of *avodat Hashem*, and that such a standard is even necessary in those arenas. Even a minor blemish can fault. A red heifer is rendered halakhically invalid if it has even two hairs that are not red. An animal that has some minor scratch, such as a withered spot in the eye,is similarly invalid. The Gemara (*Gittin* 56a) famously relates a story in which the fate of the Temple itself hinged upon R. Zekharia ben Avkulas’ dogged adherence to this standard of purity.[[5]](#footnote-5) Additionally, beyond the technical *halakhot* of blemished offerings, there is value ascribed to complete purity even with regard to offerings that are not subject to these laws, such as bird-offerings,[[6]](#footnote-6) wood for the altar and meal-offerings. This is the ideal of being *tamim*, perfect: “See that they are *temimim*, without blemish” (*Bemidbar* 28:31) – the offerings must be totally pure.

In the physical world, in particular with regard to the standards of purity that apply in the Temple, this level of punctiliousness is certainly understandable. But can the same degree of rigor, the same in-or-out binary dichotomy truly apply at the human plane as well, particularly at the human spiritual plane? The saying goes that, in certain contexts, “a miss is as good as a mile.” But is that applicable in the spiritual world as well? And if so, just how high is the bar for entrance into the realm of *tahara*?

To that end, is the quest for *tahara* irrelevant to those unable to fathom and internalize the spiritual import that the Rambam assigns to *tevila* (ritual immersion)? The Rambam explains that while the world of *tum’a* and *tahara* is physical in so many ways, there is also a metaphorical element here:

The immersion ... requires focusing the intent of one’s heart.... There is an allusion involved: One who focuses his heart on purifying himself becomes purified once he immerses, even though there was no change in his body. Similarly, one who focuses his heart on purifying his soul from the impurities of the soul, which are wicked thoughts and bad character traits, becomes purified when he resolves within his heart to distance himself from such counsel and immerse his soul in the waters of knowledge. (*Hilkhot Mikva’ot* 11:12)

According to the Rambam, one is considered *tahor* only if one understands the spiritual significance of *tevila* and seeks to attain that level. From a halakhic perspective one is either *tahor* or *tamei*, with no status between the two. Either one’s *tevila* is successful or it is not,whether this is due to a *chatzitza* (separation between the water and one’s body) or for a different reason. Can we apply the same standard to the quest for *tahara* that R. Pinchas ben Yair outlines, asserting that the slightest *chatzitza* disqualifies the total process, denudes it of meaning, of significance, of substance? The prospect of such a reality seems quite frightening.

**The Elitism of *Teshuva***

One unique type of *tahara* is the purity that *teshuva*-seekers pursueas a part of the process of atonement: “For on this day will He forgive you, to purify you, that you may be pure of all your sins before God” (*Vayikra* 16:30). Is that *tahara*, too, only for those who are totally pure? Is it reserved for those who have not only avoided immersing with a *sheretz* (impure animal) still in hand, but who, having discarded the *sheretz*, experience a perfect immersion, complete with no invalidating *chatzitza*? It seems inconceivable that they are the only ones who are *tahor* and who thus merit *tahara* on Yom Kippur. If we indeed reach this conclusion, exalting and idealizing the process of *teshuva* and raising it to heights that are beyond the reach of the ordinary *beinoni*, there may be no greater way to weaken the resolve and determination of *ba’alei teshuva*.

Having thus established the elitism and perfectionism that characterizes the *tahara* discussed in *Mesillat Yesharim*, and having acknowledged the obstacle this presents in terms of the accessibility of *teshuva* to the ordinary person, let us ask a new question. If one indeed asserts that *tahara* is the prerogative of the elect and if there is indeed no middle ground between being blemished and unblemished, should the *beinoni* simply lower his spiritual standards? The *beinoni* has relatively limited horizons and average ability, and is seemingly destined to fail to reach the dizzying heights of the ultimate *tahara*. Should he then, despairing of *tahara*, content himself with a very middling spiritual life in general and a middling *teshuva* in particular? Should he resign himself to the notion that while *teshuva* is a marvelous thing, it is so marvelous that it lies beyond his reach? Perhaps he should then infer, invoking both logic and psychology, that the *beinoni* has a different kind of *teshuva* from that of the *tzaddik*, who has already made the grade before the advent of the High Holy Days. Perhaps for the *beinoni*, muddling through the Ten Days of Repentance, striving to attain the *tahara* of Yom Kippur is beyond his grasp. The response of the *beinoni* to his predicament may be to create for himself a new model for *teshuva*, one with lower expectations and fewer spiritual demands. Thus, the idealization of elite *teshuva* can have an adverse effect on the *beinoni*, leading him not to intensify his spiritual effort, but to relax it.

To summarize the two problems raised by the idealization of *teshuva*:On the one hand, we are troubled that we cannot attain such a noble and grand ideal; on the other hand, we may resign ourselves to the understanding that if we cannot attain elite *teshuva*, we will lower our expectations and efforts, contenting ourselves with a low-key form of *teshuva*. While the Ramchal admits, regarding *tahara* at least, that even a lesser version of this quality is still virtuous and still rewarded, it belongs to a different plane and a different order.

**It Is Not in the Heavens**

In a sense, the solution to both problems lies in several verses from *Parashat Nitzavim*:

Surely, this *mitzva* which I enjoin upon you this day is not too hard for you, nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens, that you should say, “Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may do it?” Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may do it?” No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it. (*Devarim* 30:11–14)

What is this mitzva of which the Torah speaks? Commenting on the concluding verse, Rashi states that it refers not to one specific mitzva, but to the whole complex of *mitzvot* – to the totality of the world of *avodat Hashem* (30:14, s.v. *ki karov elekha*). The Ramban, however, takes issue with this. After quoting Rashi, he says:

The truth is that when it refers to the entire Torah, it says, “all the *mitzva* that I enjoin upon you today” (*Devarim* 8:1). But “this *mitzva*” refers to *teshuva*, as in, “And you take them to heart” (30:1) and “And you return to the Lord your God” (30:2).... And it is said in the indicative mood [rather than the imperative] to suggest that it is a promise; this is something that will happen in the future. (30:11, s.v. *ve-ta’am*)

According to the Ramban, this verse refers specifically to *teshuva*, and it is *teshuva* that the Torah says here “is not too hard for you, nor is it beyond reach.”

If we accept the Ramban’s interpretation, what is the message of thispassage? The content and the tone of the passage are, almost explicitly, intended to be reassuring. Don’t be concerned that attaining *teshuva* will be so difficult. On the contrary – it is close to you; you will manage. And yet, alongside the reassurance, the message is also very demanding, in a dual vein.

First, the passage anticipates the inevitable rationalization of the *beinoni*, rejecting it out of hand. When the *beinoni* hears the Torah’s declaration that *teshuva* is within his reach, he explains that although he would like to learn Torah, pray with better focus, and engage in spiritual regeneration, he is simply unable. It’s too hard, beyond his powers. He wasn’t raised in the proper home; he didn’t receive the proper education; he doesn’t live in the right kind of society; he doesn’t get communal support; he doesn’t have the necessary intellectual or moral powers – he just can’t do it. Invoking the principle that “the Torah exempts in a case of compulsion” (*Bava Kama* 28b), the *beinoni* claims that more or better could not possibly be expected of him; it is beyond his ken. Anticipating this response, the Torah insists that the *beinoni* persevere nonetheless. Thus, when the Torah says not to worry, since *teshuva* is within a person’s reach, this is not just a form of reassurance, a way of giving psychological support. There is a demand that accompanies the reassurance, namely, that there is no room to rationalize that achieving *teshuva* is impossible. No matter how mediocre a person may be, the Torah avers, *teshuva* is always within one’s reach.

There is another dimension to the Torah’s demand here. Reading between the lines of the verses, *Chazal* perceived a second, implicit and possibly contradictory message:

What is the significance of the text: “It is not in the heavens ... neither is it beyond the sea”? It is not in the heavens – for if it were in the heavens, you should have gone up after it; and if it were beyond the sea, you should have gone over the sea after it. (*Eruvin* 55a)

Contrary to the literal meaning of the verse, which implies that theoretically one would be exempt from *teshuva* if it were beyond one’s abilities, this passage indicates that there is no excuse for not pursuing *teshuva* – even if it is “in the heavens” or “beyond the sea.” In light of this understanding, the verse constitutes a factual statement that carries with it both an element of reassurance as well as a persistent and total demand. If it is in the heavens, you must strap on a parachute and retrieve it. If it is beyond the sea, you must likewise go to the necessary lengths to reach the goals that the Torah has set forth.

What we previously understood as a very reassuring section in the Torah is now, in light of the passage in *Eruvin*, extremely and powerfully demanding. In this reading, the manifest thrust of the verses is that difficulty is no excuse – not with respect to observing the *mitzvot* generally, not with respect to Torah study specifically and not, in light of the Ramban’s interpretation, with respect to *teshuva*. We are told, on the one hand, that the limited spiritual talents of the *beinoni* are sufficient to achieve a satisfactory level of *teshuva* from the Torah’s point of view. *Teshuva* is not in the heavens; it is not beyond the sea – in other words, it is attainable. Will it be perfect? Will it compare to the *teshuva* of the *Chafetz Chayim*? Certainly not. But there exists a *teshuva* of the *beinoni* that is also a form of *avodat Hashem*. God accepts this kind of *teshuva* as well, and it, too, has religious and spiritual significance. But the concurrent message is that one must do all that one can, exerting all the effort at one’s disposal, harnessing all of one’s energies and all of one’s capacities in order to attain the noblest religious end. If we read these two messages together, they assert that we may be granted a compassionate discount with regard to accomplishment and attainment – God will be satisfied with whatever you are able to achieve – but not with regard to effort and exertion. We are not held responsible for our output, but we are strictly accountable for our input.

**The Ethos of Effort in the Torah**

In contrast to certain foreign religious orientations, the world of Halakha is a system in which objective elements count for a great deal. But by encouraging us to try our hardest to reach the highest level of *teshuva*,the Torah here seems to promote an ethos of effort that, even within this highly objective system, has great subjective significance. Suppose one tries and cannot reach the heavens or beyond the sea. The Torah insists that one’s effort was not for naught; on the contrary, it had a great deal of meaning. This ethos is central to our perception of the spiritual world.

*Chazal* maintained that the ethos of effort and intent partly reflects certain details of Halakha at the level of *ta’amei ha-mitzvot* (reasons for the commandments). The final *mishna* in *Menachot* points out that the phrase *rei’ach nicho’ach* (a sweet savor) appears with regard to various gradations of offerings, including those of cattle, birds and flour*.* Objectively, these types of offerings differ significantly from one another in terms of their proportions and, presumably, in terms of the financial sacrifice made by the person bringing the offering. But the Torah uses the same phrase for each offering to communicate the message that “It is the same whether one offers much or little, so long as he directs his heart to heaven” (*Menachot* 110a). While this is not to suggest that one may subjectify religious observance completely, there is, at the very least, a recognition of the value of attempt, irrespective of results.[[7]](#footnote-7)

In this respect, the stress upon effort is reassuring and rewarding for us, the *beinonim*, in our mediocrity. But the flip side of this is that while the results become less critical, the exertion and the degree of exertion become much more critical.

To some extent, this ethos of effort and intent has a universal aspect; *Chazal* perceived it as relevant not only to the narrow world of Torah and *mitzvot*, but in a much broader sense to the human condition in general. In this connection, there is a remarkable Talmudic passage that I never tire of quoting to my students:

Our Rabbis taught: Four things require strengthening (*chizzuk*), namely, Torah [study], good deeds, praying and one’s worldly occupation....

From where do we know this of Torah and good deeds? Because it says, “But you must be very strong and resolute to observe faithfully all the Teaching” (*Yehoshua* 1:7). “Be strong” – in Torah; “and resolute” – in good deeds.

From where [do we know this of] prayer? Because it says, “Look to the Lord; be strong and of good courage! O look to the Lord!” (*Tehillim* 27:14).

From where [do we know this of] one’s worldly occupation? Because it says, “Let us be strong and resolute for the sake of our people...” (*II Shemuel* 10:12). (*Berakhot* 32b)

Rashi explains the import of this passage:

“Require strengthening” – so that one will strengthen himself in them, constantly and with all his might. “Wordly occupation” – if he is an artisan, toward his craft; if he is a merchant, toward his merchandise; if he is a soldier, toward his battle.

*Chizuk* here does not refer to external strengthening but to internal reinforcement; according to Rashi, this means that one must exert maximal effort and invest maximal time. This, of course, is quite a tall order. But again, we find reassurance in the recognition that results are not the only thing that counts. One gave it a good try, played the game by its rules, and is rewarded in kind. But the flip side of that is that playing the game by its rules means going all out.

The application of this ethos of effort to *teshuva* is clear, particularly for the *beinoni* during the Ten Days of Repentance. He can be reassured by the fact that the effort he exerts in achieving even the paltriest measure of *teshuva* is recognized and rewarded. But at the same time, he is charged with going all out, with doing his best to attain the very highest level of *teshuva*, even if it seems obviously beyond his ability.

**The Torah’s View of Mediocrity**

Broadly speaking, Jewish thought and Halakha do not contain the kind of disdain for mediocrity (or for the middle class as its representative) that is such a pervasive theme in so much of nineteenth-century literature. Neither does one find the kind of admiration and idealization of the simpleton, the child, the animal, the primitive and the unschooled that pervades a good deal of Romantic literature, nor the idealization of power found in much late nineteenth-century writing (not only in Nietzsche). In those sources, the mediocre were disdained for being bourgeois and philistine, “a nation of small shopkeepers,”asNapoleonsaid of England dismissively. The narrator in Dostoyevsky’s *Notes from the Underground* states that he wants to be “either hero or dirt – there was no middle ground.” That is not an attitude to which we can relate; indeed, this approach is not endemic to our world.

At times, traditional Jewish literature seemingly idealizes the average. We read in the *haftara* of the first day of Rosh Ha-shana that Chana requested “*zera anashim*” (*I* *Shemuel* 1:11) from God. The simple meaning of this phrase (which literally means “seed of men”) is “a male child”; i.e., Chana wanted to have a boy. But according to one view in the *gemara* (*Berakhot* 31b), Chana was requesting “a child that is swallowed up among men” because he is so average and inconspicuous – not too tall and not too short, not too strong and not too weak, not too smart and not too stupid – completely mediocre! But even in instances where our literature promotes a vision of greatness, it is not accompanied by disdain for the average, for the mediocre, for the day-to-day life of ordinary people. On the other hand, it does not necessarily follow from this that mediocrity in the spiritual realm can be accepted, let alone admired as such.

What, then, is the role of mediocrity in the world of *teshuva*? Let us first explain what we mean when we refer to “mediocre *teshuva*.” Mediocre *teshuva* may be emotional flaccid, halakhically pallid, spiritually insipid, limited in aspiration, lacking animation and not driven by a sharp sense of guilt. It may be characterized by a yearning to come close to God, but in a very low-key manner, involving no great emotional or spiritual exertion internally and no great effort to make amends, to try to chart a new path externally. This kind of mediocre *teshuva* cannot relate to the demanding standard that the Torah sets forth (as explained in the *gemara* in *Eruvin*) charging us to go into the heavens and beyond the sea in pursuit of *teshuva*, if need be.

While this *teshuva* is not totally worthless, it is indeed grievously inadequate. Even if we assume, counter to the Rambam’s assertion (*Hilkhot Teshuva* 2:4), that one does not need to completely reinvent oneself in order to attain *teshuva*, and that it is enough to look at oneself and seek to rebuild and regenerate while maintaining one’s identity, this still requires copious effort, engagement and involvement. Where that is lacking, the pallid result hardly conforms with the ideals or the standards of *teshuva*.

In light of this, we can be neither halakhically nor philosophically content with a *teshuva* that is born of convenience and limited by convenience. Nor is it wise, just or acceptable to expect that God should be content with this kind of *teshuva*. If, however, we try our best with our own talents and our own intellectual and moral powers, but we nevertheless fall short because of our confined ability, our constricted horizons or inimical circumstances, our *teshuva* is wholly acceptable. “It is the same whether one offers much or little”; there is a regard for effort as opposed to results, not only in the realm of Torah study or sacrificial offerings, but in the realm of *teshuva* as well.

**Let Us Search and Examine Our Ways**

The complete *teshuva* for which we pray in the *Shemoneh Esrei* and in *Avinu Malkeinu* is defined, fundamentally, by spiritual input, and not solely, or primarily, by the level of results. When a *beinoni*, a mediocre person, engages in *teshuva*, the objective result will inevitably be mediocre as well, as it proceeds from a mediocre progeny, from a mediocre mind, from a mediocre soul. It is limited by the abilities and horizons of its agent. However, that is only one kind of mediocrity – the kind that is much less critical in defining complete *teshuva*. Where there is mediocrity in attainment and achievement, but no mediocrity in exertion, effort and intent – that is, indeed, *teshuva sheleima*, complete *teshuva*.

There are three tests that can be used to ascertain whether *teshuva sheleima* has been achieved: the question of initiative, the question of concomitant attitude and the question of aspiration.

The first question, the question of initiative, serves to determine whether we are on the right track, whether we are proceeding in the right direction, whether our efforts are being directed properly. The verse in *Eikha* says: “Let us search and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord” (3:40). This is the point of departure for fundamental *teshuva*. Citing this verse, the Talmud presents a limited application to the world of *teshuva*: “If a man sees that painful suffering visits him, let him examine his conduct” (*Berakhot* 5a). If one is a religious person, one does not regard his trials and tribulations simply as a matter of accident or fate, but as being, in some sense, providentially ordained. So he looks into himself, to see if altering his conduct might improve his situation. That application seems to circumscribe the need for us to “search and examine our ways” to times of crisis. In the context of the verse in *Eikha*, this understanding is very reasonable; the book mourns the national crisis of the destruction of the Temple and the events surrounding it, which itself symbolizes the destruction of the people and the devastation of the country. So indeed, this was a case of “If a man sees that painful suffering visits him,” not on the individual level, but at the collective plane.

But the verse can be taken in a broader sense as well, as the Rambam indeed does in his discussion of free will and its scope: “Every human being is free to become righteous like Moshe our Teacher or wicked like Yerovam” (*Hilkhot Teshuva* 5:2). This is a remarkable, almost incredible statement. The idea that a person has the freedom to reach either extreme of virtue and of sin runs quite contrary to our self-image. We do not imagine that we will reach the spiritual heights of Moshe Rabbeinu, nor do we imagine that we will set up golden calves like Yerovam ben Nevat. But the Rambam, in fighting against advocates of the philosophy of predetermination, is conveying the message that our spiritual achievements and failings – even to the extremes of Moshe or Yerovam – are never set in stone. Thus, the Rambam continues:

Since free choice is in our hands and our own decision [caused us to] commit all these wrongs, it is proper for us to repent and abandon our wickedness, for this choice is presently in our hand. This is implied by the following verse: “Let us search and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord.”

For the Rambam, turning back to the Lord – i.e., *teshuva –* is not just for those who find themselves in anxiety and tribulation; it is for everyone.

R. Yosef Dov Soloveitchik used an analogy of *chametz* (leaven) to explain how one should relate to *teshuva*. On Pesach, no *chametz* may be found in one’s home. But it is not enough simply to throw away the bread in one’s pantry in the time leading up to the holiday; the halakhic obligation of *bedikat chametz* requires one to initiate a formal, intensive search for *chametz* throughout one’s home. R. Soloveitchik explained that this idea is at the root of the difference between *teshuva* throughout the year and *teshuva* during the Ten Days of Repentance and Yom Kippur. All year, if one realizes that one sinned, one is obligated to repent. However, this is a narrow, specific obligation whose goal is to remedy an immediate spiritual crisis. This *teshuva* is not meant to advance and enrich one’s spiritual life in any broad, overarching way. There is certainly no obligation for a person to wake up each morning and give himself a thorough spiritual self-examination. But during the Ten Days of Repentance, that is precisely what one is obligated to do. One must engage in a kind of spiritual *bedikat chametz*: “Let us search and examine our ways.”

In this context, two points should be stressed. First, the verse does not limit the requirement to search and examine ourselves to our actions alone. Action-centric *teshuva* does exist; indeed, the Rambam speaks of a very narrowly focused form of *teshuva* – where one addresses each individual transgression that he has committed – in the first and second chapters of *Hilkhot Teshuva*. Later on, however, from chapter 5and on, the Rambam speaks not of this narrowly focused *teshuva*, but of *teshuva* in the broad sense, of self-examination and self-regeneration. The language of the verse alludes to this broad scope: “Let us search and examine *our ways* (*darkeinu*)” *–* and not only our actions.

The word *derekh* appears in the context of *teshuva* in various other verses as well. R. Soloveitchik expanded on this, citing the first verse in *Tehillim*: “Happy is the man who has not followed the counsel of the wicked, or taken the path of sinners (*derekh chatta’im*).”The verse is not referring only to the actions of sinners, but to the path they take, their direction, their lifestyle, their scale of values, their order of priorities – the very mode of their existence. The same is true in a versefrom *Yeshayahu*, in a passage that epitomizes the essence of the Ten Days of Repentance: “Seek the Lord while He can be found... Let the wicked give up his ways (*darko*), the sinful man his plans” (55:6–7). We need to examine not only if we ate non-kosher food or were involved in prohibited relationships, if we committed one particular transgression or another. Much more than that – we must examine the very modality that engages us, to which we are committed and which, relatively speaking, we neglect. This is the meaning of “Let us search and examine our ways.” These ways include not only the generality of action, but the spiritual elements no less. We need to relate to the *Zikhronot* (remembrances) prayer on Rosh Ha-shana, in which we state that God does not overlook “each person’s works, his purpose ... the thoughts and plans of all mankind, and the impulses behind each person’s acts.” God remembers not only our actions, but the thoughts and the element of self-deceit behind these actions that lead us astray. The spiritual perspective does not confine itself to judging a person’s external actions, purifying them or repairing them, but to repairing the totality of one’s personality.

We note further that there are two separate verbs in this verse: searching and examining. Searching refers to gathering the data, while examining is analyzing that data. The process of searching ourselves is often unpleasant. Once one begins to scrape the surface of his self-image, he may discover that while his actions pass muster, the motives behind these actions are not as proper as they should be. He may then come to the realization that he is not at the spiritual level that he had previously thought. Despite this challenge, meaningful *teshuva* must involve search. The verse states: “The lifebreath of man is the lamp of the Lord, revealing all his inmost parts” (*Mishlei* 20:27). Just as God searches the “inmost parts” of man, we are charged with doing the same for ourselves. We must search ourselves, scrutinizing not only what we do with our hands, with our mouth and with our feet, but what is in our heart of hearts. Only after we search can we examine, trying to understand and evaluate what we have seen.

Before a person undergoes a medical procedure or begins a treatment regimen, doctors must first arrive at a proper diagnosis. The same is true of the *teshuva* of the mediocre, no less than that of the highly skilled. Of course, cognoscenti with great sensitivity and knowledge will probe more deeply, understand more richly and be more sensitive to nuances. Their searching and examining will perhaps produce better objective results. But the process of searching and examining as such, as well as the awareness of its significance and its imperative need, is common to the educated and the boorish, to the mediocre and the superior. The critical aspect is not how well we assess ourselves, in terms of what we put on the table when the process is complete, but how we evaluate the process itself and to what extent we are engaged and committed to it.

It is a truism of religious philosophy that we are, in effect, *shomerim*,custodians. On the one hand, we are custodians of the world at large; God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden “to cultivate it and to guard it” (*Bereishit* 2:15). But first and foremost we are custodians of ourselves, and the injunction “to cultivate it and to guard it” applies equally to this domain. The Talmud speaks of four different types of *shomerim*: the unpaid guardian, the paid guardian, the renter and the borrower. According to the Talmud(*Bava Metzia* 93b), the difference between the unpaid guardian and the paid guardian is not only that the latter must remunerate the owner if the object is stolen or lost, while the former is not held liable in such cases. There is also a difference in the quality and the level of the service that the guardian is expected to provide. One position in the *gemara* states that for an unpaid guardian, it is sufficient to guard the item “as people do,” i.e., as people do with respect to their own possessions – in a relatively relaxed manner. A normal person does not stand at the door of his home all day with a gun, or keep his money in an armored car, so an unpaid guardian is held to the same standard. However, a paid guardian is providing a professional service and is thus expected to carry out this service professionally. Similarly, if we are custodians of ourselves, and “Let us search and examine our ways” is one facet of that custodianship, then we are not unpaid guardians; we are paid guardians. It is not enough to assess ourselves “as people do”; it is not enough to do the bare minimum, taking it easy as long as we are not positively negligent. We are paid guardians and “Let us search and examine our ways” is the high standard that is expected of us as a result.

This is the essence of the element of initiative that is so critical to *teshuva* generally conceived and applicable to the *teshuva* of the mediocre no less than the *teshuva* of the elite. It means plumbing the depths, exploring, and acting on this exploration to the best of our abilities. While it may be that a more sophisticated person will reach a little more deeply than his less talented counterpart, the critical factor is that every person at every stratum must search and examine.

***Keva* vs. *Tachanunim***

The second element of *teshuva sheleima* is the element of attitude. The Talmud (*Berakhot* 29b) discusses the *Mishna*’sstatement that prayer should resemble *tachanunim* (supplications). It is a kind of imploring, not just presenting a list of demands, but genuine supplication. If, on the other hand, one’s prayer is *keva* (fixed), it cannot be *tachanunim*. The *gemara* presents various interpretations for the word *keva*, which seems to be presentedas the opposite of *tachanunim*. One of these interpretations is especially relevant, not just to prayer but to *avodat Hashem* generally, and to *teshuva* particularly: “Anyone whose prayer is like a heavy burden on him.” Such a person is observant and totally committed to the Halakha; it would be unthinkable for him to forgo the fulfillment of a mitzva such as prayer. But what does he bring to bear to that fulfillment? Is there a sense of excitement? Does he, a man of flesh and blood, feel the incredible merit of being able to stand before the Master of the Universe in prayer? Does he recognize the emotional and spiritual need to pray, beyond the technical halakhic requirement? Or perhaps it is all a burden: Three times a day the bell tolls and he has to pray – so he prays.

R. Soloveitchik once commented regarding certain segments of American Jewry that a Jew “doesn’t want to *daven*; he wants to have *davened*.”While such a person indeed considers prayer a duty that must be fulfilled, he does not feel the spiritual urge to pray; he simply wants the task to be over with. He would never shirk his responsibility to go to pray at the synagogue, nor would he miss Torah reading. But he is not charged by it and he is not charged for it.

*Teshuva* is sometimes approached as a cold duty as well, including the element of searching and examining that we discussed above. When the Ten Days of Repentance begin, one might consult the Rambam and the *Shulchan Arukh* and find the law stating that one must do *teshuva* during this period. If one considers himself a halakhic Jew and a good soldier, he will do it – but it is a burden. He would rather not have to get up early for *selichot* and undergo the various unpleasant ordeals inherent in the process of searching and examining himself. But he does it, almost against his will, because he feels that he must. But *teshuva sheleima* must be genuinely meaningful, in terms of one’s attitude. Most importantly for our discussion, this quality of *teshuva* is just as pertinent for the mediocre as it is for the exceptional. There is no reason that a person who is mediocre in religious talents should be less genuinely driven by the religious impetus for *teshuva* than a person who is religiously sharp and sensitive. If the *teshuva* of the mediocre comes from a place of pure motivation and earnestness, it is fully acceptable.

**“*Teshuva* From” and “*Teshuva* To”**

The third element of complete *teshuva*, in addition to initiative and attitude,is the element of aspiration. For what does one yearn? What is one’s vision? What does one dream about in bed at night and in the course of his daily activity? *Teshuva* can be truly mediocre if it is devoid of aspiration. Such *teshuva* lacks vision: One might search and examine himself, perhaps with the proper motivation as well; but it is not part of any grand vision or continuous process. His acts of *teshuva* are a series of islands – a whole archipelago, perhaps – but there is no yearning, and that is what makes his *teshuva* mediocre. So much of *teshuva* is about yearning. Yearning is both the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem* of *teshuva*, both its point of departure and its destination.

*Teshuva* has two fundamental channels: the moral and the religious. These two channels can be seen in the linguistic presentation of *teshuva* in our traditional texts as being “*teshuva* from” or “*teshuva* to.” The moral channel is the impetus to respond to sin and evil in their broadest sense and to rid oneself of them. This is “*teshuva* from,” where one wants to get away from a negative place or situation, as in, “Turn back, turn back from your evil ways” (*Yechezkel* 33:11). Similarly, theRambam’s introductory title for his *Hilkhot Teshuva* reads, “That a sinner should repent from his sin.”There is a recoil, a revulsion from sin and from evil in all shapes and forms. However, this recoil has a positive side to it as well. It is a desire to get away from being soiled by sin and to achieve a life of purity and perfection, in which one has left behind his “evil ways” and has assumed a new lifestyle and possibly a new identity. That is the *teshuva* of the first two chapters of *Hilkhot Teshuva* and of many verses in the *Tanakh*. This moral *teshuva* is not satisfied with simply cleaning one’s hands of sin and leaving it at that. It must also be conjoined by a desire and a vision to attain spiritual good, purity and integrity. There is also the religious channel of *teshuva*, not to be pulled “from” something, to get away, but to be drawn “to” something or Someone – “*el Hashem*” or “*ad Hashem*,” as in, “Come, let us turn back to the Lord” (*Hoshe’a* 6:1).

Both channels, the moral and the religious, include the element of aspiration that is critical to complete *teshuva*, albeit perhaps in different proportions. If one wants to repair his relationship with God and, once more, enjoy His favor and His grace, have access to Him and feel close to Him, his *teshuva* must contain the aspiration of purity, in both moral and religious terms. This element of aspiration, like the elements of initiative and attitude, is wholly endemic to, wholly accessible to, and ultimately, it is hoped, thoroughly characteristic of the *teshuva* of the mediocre. Even the most mediocre spiritual pilgrim can and must transcend the bounds of his mediocrity and attain previously unscaled heights, possibly allowing him to develop a fresh identity in the process.

**A Person Should Always Strive**

In a sense, one might say that the only fundamental aspiration of the *teshuva* of the *beinoni* is to leave the ranks of the mediocre. He has been a *beinoni* for a long time and now his spiritual self has undergone a revolution; he is no longer a *beinoni* but a different person entirely, as the Rambam says. He will join the aristocratic elite; he will be one of the “sons of heaven” who are “but few.” He will stand where complete *tzaddikim* cannot stand. That is, indeed, one aspect. But realistically, this kind of total transformation, this transmutation of the self, is a rarity. It is not easily achieved and not generally common. It may be one’s goal or intended destination, but it cannot be considered thoroughly characteristic of the ordinary process of *teshuva*. However, that certainly does not mean that for a person who recognizes that he is a *beinoni* and will remain a *beinoni*,the element of aspiration cannot be conceived in more limited terms. Indeed, there are many different levels of *beinoniyut,* both quantitatively and qualitatively. Part of the element of aspiration in *teshuva* is a recognition of this spectrum, contrary to the perspective of *Mesillat Yesharim* that one is either in or out, with no gradation in between. We must recognize that *teshuva* is not simply a destination attained; it is a direction pursued.[[8]](#footnote-8)

There is a remarkable word that appears in *Hilkhot Teshuva*, in a halakhathat we cited above:

Since free choice is given to all people, as explained, a person should always strive (*yishtadel*)to do *teshuva* and to confess verbally for his sins, striving to cleanse his hands from sin in order that, upon dying as one who has done *teshuva*,he merit the life of the World-to-Come. (7:1)

What does it mean that a person should “strive, *yishtadel*”? The Rambam never says that a person must “strive” to eat matza on Pesach, or that one should “strive” to eat in the *sukka* on Sukkot*.* These are obligations, period. Indeed, the Rambam uses that exact terminology in the first chapter of *Hilkhot Teshuva*, stating that when one discovers that he has sinned, he is *obligated* to follow a certain process of atonement. But here, in chapter 7, the Rambam is speaking of the overall spiritual direction of a person’s life, and in this context it is the striving – the effort and the ethos of effort that we discussed above – that is crucial and central. It is a reflection of the fact that *teshuva* is a process and not necessarily a Rubicon that one must cross.

The Rambam’s injunction to strive to do *teshuva* also throws down the gauntlet before us. Even when we are not engaged in a specific, narrowly focused element of *teshuva,* the impetus to move along that path, to leave “the path of sinners”and “turn back, turn back from your evil ways”in pursuit of new paths and newdirections, is indeed central to *teshuva*. Moreover, it is central not just to the *teshuva* of the cognoscenti and the sophisticated; it is crucial to the *teshuva* of the average person, the average Jew, the average man and the average woman. These people maybe mediocre in certain respects, but their *teshuva* – in terms of effort and intent – need in no way be mediocre. “A person should always strive”: Even when that *teshuva* itself is mediocre in terms of its objective results, that mediocre *teshuva*, too, has great potential for being accepted and for helping one achieve atonement. It can be meaningful and vital both for him and for God Himself.

**You Shall Be Purified Before the Lord**

During the Ten Days of Repentance leading up to Yom Kippur, we stand with anticipation and trepidation, a mixture of awe bordering on terror knowing that the books of life and death are open before Him (*Rosh Ha-shana* 32b). We feel excitement that this marvelous day not only charges us to purify ourselves, but in turn purifies us as well. We are told that none other than God Himself – *Mikveh Yisrael* – will purify us. In the midst of these heady emotions, we start asking ourselves where we stand and if we are indeed worthy of atonement and purification. Have we, out of the depths of our own mediocrity, done all that we could?

The Rambam speaks of the wonders of *teshuva* in *Hilkhot Teshuva* 7:7:

How exalted is the level of *teshuva*! Previously, the [transgressor] was separate from God, the Lord of Israel, as it states: “But your iniquities have been a barrier between you and your God” (*Yeshayahu* 59:2). He would call out [to God] without being answered, as it states: “Though you pray at length, I will not listen” (1:15).

He would fulfill *mitzvot*, only to have them crushed before him, as it states: “Who asked that of you, to trample My courts?” (1:12), and it states: “If only you would lock My doors, and not kindle fire on My altar to no purpose! I take no pleasure in you – said the Lord of Hosts – and I will accept no offering from you” (*Malakhi* 1:10).

He was despised and despicable; God did not want to hear of him or from him. But that was yesterday; today, however:

Now, he is clinging to the Divine Presence, as it states: “You, who held fast to the Lord your God” (*Devarim* 4:4). He calls out [to God] and is answered immediately, as it states: “Before they pray, I will answer” (*Yeshayahu* 65:24). He fulfills *mitzvot* and they are accepted with pleasure and joy, as it states: “For your action was long ago approved by God” (*Kohelet* 9:7), and it states: “Then the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of yore and in the years of old” (*Malakhi* 3:4).

This passage speaks not only to the philosopher, not only to the person with profound insight and wisdom; it speaks to the average person.

Particularly during the Ten Days of Repentance, the *beinoni* must ask himself if he has done enough and exerted enough effort to merit this sublime state, this intimate connection with God that the Rambam declares is the bounty of *teshuva*. If we can indeed exert that effort, within the context of all our limitations, we can stand before the Creator on Yom Kippur and, in all humility, say that we did what we could and we tried our best. In the language of *Selichot* of erev Rosh Ha-shana, we have acted “as is our craft (*ke-umanuteinu*)”; now we ask You to act “as is Your craft” (*ke-umanutekha*), namely, to see that the nation of Israel as a whole is purified and worthy to enjoy the blessing of “the whole Israelite community shall be forgiven” (*Bemidbar* 15:26, 11:50). When God fulfills our request, we will be worthy of the purity and sanctitydescribed in the verse: “For on this day atonement shall be made for you to purify you of all your sins; you shall be purified before the Lord” (*Vayikra* 16:30).

1. Adapted by Daniel Landman and Reuven Ziegler from a transcript by Michael Platt, Ariela Goldsmith and Dov Karoll. This was delivered as the annual YU Hausman-Stern *Teshuva* *Derasha* in Tishrei 5764 (Sept. 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Although the Rambam uses the term *ba’al teshuva* here, he is using it differently from the way it is used in our nomenclature. Today, a *ba’al teshuva* is one who was previously not committed to Torah and *mitzvot*, but then repented, adopting a life of commitment to those ideals. By contrast, the Rambam’s *ba’al teshuva* is one who was committed all along to Torah and *mitzvot* but would sin on occasion, and who then sought to perfect himself by engaging in *teshuva*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For the Rambam, the goal is universal in the broadest sense of the term – “free choice is given to all people” – but for our purposes we will confine ourselves to universality within the Jewish people. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Do we indeed observe empirically that all the righteous – having been written positively on Rosh Ha-shana – survive the upcoming year? Do all the wicked die in the course of the upcoming year? The *gemara*’s dichotomy does not seem to be borne out in reality. Furthermore, the Rambam defines a *beinoni* as a person who is in a position of exact equipoise. If he is mostly wicked, he is a *rasha*; if he is mostly righteous, he is a *tzaddik*. One good deed or one sin can tip the scales in either direction; a *beinoni* is exactly in the middle. This strikes us as a difficult reality – who is exactly in the middle? The Rambam seems somewhat troubled by these issues at the beginning of the third chapter of *Hilkhot Teshuva*, while the Ra’avad has adamant objections to his approach. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Certain people, in an attempt to sow discord between the Romans and the Jews, suggested that the Emperor send a calf to the Jews to offer at the Temple in order to test their loyalty. A very minor blemish was inflicted on the calf, one that seemed insignificant to the Romans but which rendered the offering impure by halakhic standards. R. Zekharia ben Avkulas refused to compromise and allow the calf to be offered, infuriating the Romans and causing R. Yochanan to declare, “Through the scrupulousness of R. Zekharia ben Avkulas our House has been destroyed.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. A bird-offering is only invalidated if a whole organ is missing, but not in the case of a less severe blemish. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Of course, one may not simply invoke the principle that “God requires the heart” (*Sanhedrin* 106b) and be content as long as one’s heart is in the right place. It is certainly not immaterial whether one does more or does less in his *avodat Hashem*. In discussing the relationship between Torah scholars and laymen, the *gemara* (*Berakhot* 17a) states that a Torah scholar should not be haughty because he sits in the *beit midrash* and the other person sits in a factory or in an office. And yet, the *gemara* continues, perhaps one may protest, arguing that while the layman may come home at night and look a little bit at the *daf yomi*, the Torah scholar sits studying Torah the whole day. Thus, the Gemara continues, one must bear in mind the *mishna* in *Menachot* cited above: “It is the same whether one offers much or little, so long as he directs his heart to heaven” (110a). *Chazal* were not suggesting that whether a person learns a little or a lot is irrelevant; on the contrary, it is very relevant! But the message is that it is all a function of opportunity and ability, and sometimes circumstance. The result of a person’s actions in *avodat Hashem* may be objectively deficient, but their subjective content has the potential to elevate those actions to great heights in the eyes of God. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. There are, of course, certain halakhic elements in *teshuva* that we must be able to define concretely for various purposes. Has a person done *teshuva* or not? Can he bring an offering or is he forbidden to do so? Is he considered a *mumar* (apostate) or not? It is important that we answer these and other local and specific questions. But broadly conceived, in more general, spiritual terms, we can leave aside those definitions and speak of *teshuva* as a process, orientation or direction. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)