

CHAPTER NINETY

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

There is a hypothesis that says: "use it or lose it." What it refers to is that given any part of ones being, if you don't exercise it, that part will atrophy and wither away. Doctors have now shown that using ones brain by learning new things and stretching the mind in some ways, can help us maintain "brainpower" as we age. They have shown that those who keep their minds fresh with new activity, (such as *Daf Hayomi*), stand a reduced risk of Alzheimer's disease and other such afflictions. This only proves what our Torah Sages have long held to be vital for our spiritual well being. One never stops being a student; Torah learning is for all life, and every life. If we stop learning and striving for fresh understanding; then our spiritual mind becomes atrophied, and stagnates, to our ultimate regret.

The Rebbe Reb Bunim of Peshischa narrated the following parable: "A father loaned his son a thousand thalers to establish him in business. When the time for repayment came, he perceived that his son had used the money wisely and successfully, and he therefore made him a gift of the money loaned. On another occasion he lent the same amount to a second son. When the time came for repayment, he found that the youth had used the money unwisely; in order to prevent further losses he withdrew his money and the son was compelled to abandon the business.

"It is the same with us. Hashem loans us the impulse to judge ourselves and to repent of our unworthy deeds. If we use this impulse wisely and increase it through sincere study, pure worship and admirable conduct, Hashem leaves this impulse with us. But if we do nothing and make no use of this impulse ourselves, He takes it back, and we remain unrepentant and sinful."

This is 'use it or lose it' write large, and should be a warning to us all. True, repentance is one of the most difficult things to do. It entails coming to terms with your real inner motives, and having the humility to admit selfish desires. To step away from yourself and see the real you is not always a pretty sight, and change takes courage. Hashem gave us a gift, this impulse of self judgement, unfortunately, it often lies in the ruins of our fearful inner selves, and we never get out of the mire we have created.

There is another adage that comes to mind: "No pain, no gain." You can't expect to grow without some growing pains. *Teshuva* should be an on going experience, not one set aside just for Yom Kippur. It is the small daily battles that decide who we are, and it is there that we must use our heart and mind to the fullest.

The fourth book of *Tehillim* starts with eleven consecutive portions composed by Moshe Rebbeinu. Rashi tells us that they correspond to the eleven blessings which he bestowed upon eleven of the Tribes as seen in *Devarim*. The Medrash Shochar Tov explains that the theme of each of the eleven *kapitlach* relates to a specific tribe. This Psalm speaks of *teshuva* and relates to the Tribe of Reuven the first of the Tribes blessed.

What does Reuven have to do with *teshuva*? We are told how he repented his actions during the episode of the sale of Joseph. *Chazal* tell us that it was Reuven who first introduced the principle of complete repentance to the world. One could ask a simple question about this statement, was then Reuven the first *baal teshuva*? Haven't we seen others before him repent of misdeeds? *Guttes Yiden* were wont to say that this may be so, but Reuven did *teshuva* over a sin that he committed for an act he thought of as being *leshem shamayim*! He was convinced he was doing the right thing concerning his brother. For him to do *teshuva* and have such powerful remorse was a huge achievement.

The hardest *teshuva* to do is over things we are certain are morally proper. This takes enormous strength, and yes, it needs a lot of practice. You can't overturn a life time of living in one leap; you must build up the ability to seek the truth, like a weight lifter with his different weights.

TEFILLA LEMOSHE. "A prayer of Moshe, the man of G-d: My Master a dwelling place have You been for us in every generation." Moshe starts with the main reality of our existence, that Hashem is our dwelling place in every generation, in all times and at all places.

TASHEV ENOSH AD DAKA. "You reduce man to pulp, and You say, "Return, children of man!"

Man without a connection with Hashem becomes crushed into a moral mess. It is amazing, we are the only beings that are gifted with the ability to think and choose; yet we are capable of the most horrendous acts of wanton beastliness. Without a connection with Hashem we are as ships lost in the sea. However, we are never totally lost, for Hashem is calling out to us, "Return, Return."

KI ELEPH SHANIM BE'EINECHA. "For a thousand years are in Your eyes like the yesterday that had just passed, and like a night watch."

Here we are being told something that touches on the enormity of Hashem. We count days with clocks. Twenty four hours are a day, so many days are a week, on and on times marches. We measure our lives through the speed it takes for the clock hands to get around its face. However, for Hashem this is, so to speak 'all a wink of the eyelid,' for His being is beyond all time. We say this in our prayers; "He was, He is, He always will be," all this in the same moment. Hashem sees us in our future before we ever get there, and so He can reach out to us before we fail. A personal connection with Hashem keeps us away from spiritual downfall. Like a gyroscope, we are kept on the right path.

LIMNOS YAMEINU KEIN HODA. "To count our days, teach us and we will acquire a heart of wisdom."

We are being told that we, living in the material world, need to learn to value the time given us if we are to live wisely.

When we slip from our G-dly moorings, our time becomes consumed by worthless values that cheapen our inner souls. Moshe is telling us to plead with Hashem that we should become sensitive to the gift of the time. This will be the wisdom that true *teshuva* brings with it. Yidden, there are so many of our brethren who have no idea what any of this is all about, not a clue. We weep for them, but at the same time, we should weep for ourselves for having this sweet knowledge and disregarding it.

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