

TESHUVA - FOUR STEPS TO GREATNESS

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

1. Regret (charata)

Regret, as opposed to guilt, is that state of vexation in which one feels a sense of loss. If you misplace your wallet with a thousand dollars in it, you feel regret, not guilt. You have lost something of value.

In our striving for growth we must first see that our mistakes in life have resulted in the loss of something we deem to be dear and important.

2. Abandonment (aziva)

As General Schwarzkopf once put it, "Gentleman, all I can say is we identified the target in question and it no longer exists." Rationalization is the enemy and aziva is an internal mission of search and destroy.

I lost my wallet, or worse yet, I lost a friend; now how do I avoid repeating the same mistake? Once you feel the loss it's then time to set out on a personal mission of search and destroy. You must identify the rationalization, see what it was that enticed you into that cerebral snare and understand the basic untruth that is the nucleus of rationalization.

Now you must issue a cease and desist order. Stop the rationalization and put a halt to the action it sanctioned.

3. Confession (vidduy)

In other words, "Now go and say you're sorry." There is perhaps no greater torture in a child's mind than being told he has to apologize. Stick bamboo shoots under my nails, tie me to the rack—anything—but don't make me say I'm sorry!

Because when you verbalize your regret it makes everything all too real, like being on a darkened stage with the spotlight on you. There is no escape. The truth about your actions and their hurtful consequences are laid bare for all to see when you utter those simple words: "I'm sorry. I feel awful about what I did, it won't happen again. I promise."

4. Resolve (kabalah)

Say what you mean, "I'm sorry," and mean what you say, "It won't happen again." With this final act of commitment never to repeat the same mistake, you have come full circle. You have returned.

If a friend comes to you and you see that she sincerely regrets what she did, understands her mistake, wishes it had never happened and with a heavy heart apologizes and pledges never to repeat it, would you not be immediately forgiving?

What if that friend was your daughter, or what if that daughter was you?

Keeping Your Eye on the Ball

Teshuva is challenging. As a matter of fact, it can be a very uncomfortable challenge. It can be hard, and humbling, to admit our mistakes. Then to actually make changes certainly takes a lot of work and effort. What we need to remember is that growth and change are also a pleasure.

There seems to be a part of us that is all too ready to avoid work, effort and discomfort. The key to teshuva, to lasting growth, is to eliminate the confusion of comfort with pleasure. Comfort is nothing more than the absence of pain; while pain and effort and discomfort are usually prerequisites for lasting pleasure.

Think about it: Haven't your most meaningful, lasting accomplishments and deepest experiences of pleasure come at the price of great and often uncomfortable efforts? It's one of those regrettable facts of life. Picture two men at the top of a mountain: one who climbed and one who was dropped there by a helicopter. The guy who climbed will derive far more pleasure from his experience of the summit because he climbed to the top instead of taking the comfortable route.

So what can we do to overcome our tendency to flee from the necessary discomfort that is a part of teshuva and growth? We can stay focused and keep our eye on the ball—the ball of pleasure. The pleasure of growth, of moving ahead and of accessing more and more of our potential.

It actually hurts more when I'm at home than when I'm playing. It's like when I'm focused on the game, the pain goes away.

- Brady Anderson, Baltimore Orioles.