

# THE BATTLE PLAN

*by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch*

The fourth chapter of Mesilas Yesharim (1) contemplates the wonder of teshuva, the opportunity to repent and return to the path of G-d. "On the basis of justice alone it would be dictated that the sinner be punished immediately upon sinning..., that the punishment should be a wrathful one - as befits one who rebels against the word of the Creator, and that there be no correction whatsoever for the sin...If a man killed his neighbor, if he committed adultery, how can he correct this? Can he remove the accomplished fact from actuality?" Indeed, G-d in His mercy does give us time to repent, cajoling us with non-destructive reminders to root out the will to sin, a sentiment He equates with uprooting the deed itself.

But the path to true repentance is fraught with obstacles. On the simplest level, one first needs to recognize and admit to himself his errors. Then he must fervently regret them, reciting a confession before G-d that is genuine and sincere, and earnestly committing to never repeat them. But if one contemplates and dissects the concept of "temptation", one observes a fascinating phenomenon: there is a basic appetite, inherently productive and necessary, that our yetzer hara (2) then amazingly twists into an obsession for self-gratification. Even a great student of spiritual dynamics - one who appreciates that these situations are a G-d given gift to strengthen our resolve and build our G-d consciousness, one who possesses a profound intellectual understanding of the emotional forces at play - may well find himself swept into the emotional maelstrom when he confronts his temptations. How does one utilize the fantastic opportunity called teshuva if one can never rip himself away from his most intense desires?

When the Jewish nation stood at the foot of Mount Sinai, at that profound moment of choice, when they elected to accept the responsibility of fulfilling the mitzvos (Divine commands) of the Torah to foster a relationship with G-d, they declared "Everything G-d has said we will do and we will listen (na'aseh v'nishmah)." (Shemos/Exodus 24:7). It is, most basically, a statement of trust in the Divine. A child has no question as to his parents' love and devotion and trusts that all they do for him, perplexing as some of those actions may be, is to his benefit. So, too, the Jewish people have witnessed G-d's unbounded love for His nation, as manifest in myriad open miracles, and know that the Torah He gives us is for our enrichment. Notwithstanding we do not understand the minutiae of every command, nevertheless na'aseh - we will do them, then nishmah - we will strive to listen and understand.

Michtav Me'Eliyahu (3) takes na'aseh v'nishmah much further. In the ongoing struggle to cleave to G-

d and cast aside the yetzer hara, na'aseh v'nishmah is our battle plan. One who relegates his victory to an intellectual understanding of the enemy - who pursues only nishmah - greatly risks the failure described above. But one whose key to success is training in the action of service of G-d - who pursues na'aseh, in the realm of chesed (acts of loving kindness) and the realm of "ritual" mitzvos that are done solely to forge a relationship with G-d - then builds an intensity and a routine in his service that fashion a solid foundation and infrastructure onto which his intellectual understanding can bond. This, explains Rabbi Dessler, is rationale behind certain refinements of particular mitzvos that Jews observe during the Ten Days of Repentance between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. What is the value of a practice that we plan to discontinue after Yom Kippur? We understand the import of action, thus we find additional exercises that will further strengthen our resolve. It is only with na'aseh that we can accomplish nishmah.

Have a Good Shabbos!

*(1) "Path of the Just", one of the most popular Mussar (introspective Jewish self-improvement) works in Jewish literature; a moving, inspiring work describing how a thoughtful Jew may climb the ladder of purification until he attains the level of holiness; authored by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, 1707-1746 of Padua, Italy, and Amsterdam (2) internal desire to act contrary to G-d's will; in many experiences, it is the side of the internal tug-of-war that pulls us to do what we know we should not (3) collected writings and discourses of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1891-1954) of London and B'nai Brak, one of the outstanding personalities and thinkers of the Mussar movement*

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