

LBT's From Light to Liberation: *Teshuva*

Week of December 20, 2020 / 5 Tevet 5781

These texts are designed to be engaged in chevruta (with a partner), with a larger group, or on your own as part of your journey from Light to Liberation. As you approach these texts, you are invited to let the discussions and thoughts they foster live with you and be part of you. If you are reading these on your own or with others, we encourage you to read aloud.

Framing: This week, we turn our attention to *teshuva*, a word that can mean both “to turn” or “to return.” Our tradition understands that it is part of human nature to fall short. The process of *teshuva* is designed to help us physically turn ourselves toward the person that we strive to be in the world and in doing so take our human failings and turn them into a force for positivity. These two Rabbinic teachings show us the heightened role that *teshuva* plays in our tradition.

פרקי דרבי אליעזר ג'ב'

(ב) עד שלא נברא העולם, היה הקדוש ברוך הוא ושמו הגדול בלבד, ועלה במחשבה לברוא את העולם, והיה מחריט את העולם העולם לפניו ולא היה עומד. משלו משל למה הדבר דומה, למלך שהוא רוצה לבנות פלטרים שלו, אם אינו מחריט בארץ יסודותיו ומובאיו ומוצאיו, אינו מתחיל לבנות, כך הקדוש ברוך הוא החריט לפניו את העולם ולא היה עומד עד שברא את התשובה.

Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 3:2 (a midrash)

(2) Before the world was created, the Holy Blessed One's Great Name was all that existed. When the thought arose to create the world, God began to trace the world but it would not stand. The sages told a parable: It is like a king who wishes to build a palace. If the King had not traced in the ground the foundations, entrances and exits, the King could not have begun to build the palace. Likewise the Holy Blessed One was tracing the plans for the world, but it would not stand until *teshuva* was created.

משנה אבות ד'י"ז

(יז) הוא הִיָּה אֹמֵר, יָפָה שְׁעָה אַחַת בְּתִשְׁבּוּבָה וּמַעֲשֵׂים טוֹבִים בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, מִכֹּל חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא. וְיָפָה שְׁעָה אַחַת שֶׁל קוֹרֵת רוּחַ בְּעוֹלָם הַבָּא, מִכֹּל חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה: .

Pirkei Avot 4:17 (from the Mishnah)

(17) He used to say: more precious is one hour of *teshuva* and good deeds in this world, than all the life of the World to Come. And more precious is one hour of the tranquility of the world to come than all the life of this world.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why do you think God was unable to create the world without *teshuva*?
2. Why might our tradition understand *teshuva* as so essential to a functioning world?
3. Have you experienced the preciousness of *teshuva*, of reminding yourself of the gift of returning, with love and compassion? Why might the second text value *teshuva* and good deeds over the world to come?
4. How do you experience *teshuva* while meditating?