

EYE ON בעין חינוכית EDUCATION

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Teshuvah on a Small Scale

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"Year's end. When it began, I accepted upon myself to avoid mundane speech from Friday afternoon through Sunday morning. Now, the year is coming to a close. Was I up to the task that I assigned myself? I also resolved that at least once a week, I would pray fervently and wholeheartedly. Here, too, I must conduct an honest self-appraisal. Was I successful?"

Toward the end of every year, R' Yitzchak Lubliner, a student at the Novardok Yeshiva, would ask himself these questions and others. Writer Shmuel Ben-Artzi, who also learned in Novardok in his youth, describes R' Yitzchak and his friends' characters and *avodat Hashem*. In vibrant colors, Ben-Artzi depicts the yeshiva students' *cheshbon hanefesh* and personal resolutions as Rosh Hashanah approached. For instance, among other things, R' Yitzchak resolved:

1. To separate *ma'aser kesafim* from the money I will receive from my parents throughout the year.
2. To do ten "*pe'ulot*" (literally, activities) each day to "break my will."
3. To take the initiative and approach new, younger students and then to help them materially and spiritually.
4. To study *mussar* every evening, on Sunday-Thursday, immediately after supper.

In addition, at the end of the year, R' Yitzchak would painstakingly review his list of resolutions in order to determine if he had been successful.

This glimpse into a yeshiva student's inner world can help us understand the nature of teshuvah.

During our prayers on the Days of Awe, we resolve – from the depths of our hearts – to improve, to change, to make amends, and to move forward. However, sometimes, these resolutions never go beyond vague plans which are not transformed into concrete actions. Frequently, we act as if mere enthusiasm is sufficient, and we forget to outline the particular daily steps we must take in order to translate our good intentions into a practical language. Thus, R' Yitzchak's list can serve as a reminder for us about the value of spelling out the exact ways we wish to improve or change. Some might choose to emulate him and record the resolutions in a notebook. Others might prefer to record them on the walls of their hearts. But the lesson we can all learn from the vivid description of R' Yitzchak's notes is the importance of focusing on the details and knowing how to do teshuvah – even on a smaller scale – with respect to specific and routine matters.

Yet, at the same time, we must avoid the opposite problem. It is possible for a person to resolve to work on a given issue – without impacting his life's overall direction. With the exception of the specific thing he decided to change, he remains in precisely the same spot. Hence, we must recognize the importance of passion, motivation, and a comprehensive sense of responsibility. These traits allow us to turn a new page. They enable us to achieve a life of "more" - in a broad sense of the word – an exalted spiritual life, which elevates even the minor issues that require rectification.

Orot Israel College of Education

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"אותה הגדולה הנשמטית, השואפת לקודש עליון, לגדולות נשגבות, מוכרחת היא להיות מטפלת בתיקון המידות והמעשים גם כן, ולפעמים לרדת לעמקי החיים המעשיים ולנקר בפרטי פרטיותיהם, לתקנם ולכוונם" (אורות הקודש, ג, 'מוסר הקודש', עמ' קכה).

"That same spiritual greatness, which aspires to a supreme holiness, to a transcendent preeminence, must also be involved in rectifying character traits and deeds, and sometimes must descend into life's practical depths and rupture the smallest of details, in order to rectify and realign them." (Orot HaKodesh 3 – Mussar HaKodesh, p. 125)

In conclusion, we must move in both directions at the same time. On one hand, when I undertake to walk along the path of teshuvah, I must focus on the details and resolve to take clear-cut and precise steps. However, on the other hand, I must remember to look at the totality of life from a different angle: to endeavor to climb to a higher level; to add another essential tier to my character; and to attempt to connect this general revitalization to the specific ways I must modify my behavior and actions.

"צריכים להעלות את המידות והמחשבות הקטנות, אף על פי שהן טובות, אבל אינן במעלה גדולה ומאירה – למקור שורשן, ולהאירן באור של גדולה [...] כך מועילים ומטיבים לעולם כולו; בעליית המידות והמחשבות הקטנות, כשעולות לאורה גדולה" (אורות התשובה, יד א).

"We must raise the small character traits and thoughts - even if they are good, but they are not on a great and illuminating level – to their root source and to illuminate them with the light of greatness... Thus, they support and benefit the entire world by elevating small character traits and thoughts, when they rise to the great light..." (Orot HaTeshuvah 14:1)

At first glance, Rav Kook's words, which we have cited here, appear to be little more than a concise summary of the ideas presented above. However, a closer look reveals that Rav Kook zt"l actually introduces a new element into the discussion. We spoke about the need for rectifying the details – including our flawed actions – while focusing on a general sense of renewal. However, Rav Kook adds that one must also connect one's good deeds, while they are still "small." In his view, teshuvah is not only reserved for those who strayed, sinned, or caused others to sin. Rather, even one who accomplishes good things may be doing so on a small and limited scale. Therefore, even one's good deeds can - and must - be linked to an all-encompassing drive to achieve a deeper and more spiritual character.

May Hashem grant us the privilege of returning:
To ourselves and to our individualities,
To our inner dreams and visions,
To the way-of-life we wish.
To return and to connect to *Am Yisrael*,
To identify with its troubles and to rejoice at its successes,
To return to the Torah and to return to *Eretz Yisrael*,
To return to life,
To return to God.

May the year and its curses end; may the new year and its blessings begin.
Best wishes to the Orot Israel College family and the entire House of Israel for a shanah tovah.