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# YOM KIPPUR



HARAV YISROEL BROG, SHLITA | ROSH HAYESHIVA, YESHIVAS TIFERES AVIGDOR  
SHIUR PRESENTED IN 5777

## “I CAN’T CHANGE, SO WHY EVEN TRY?”

Yom Hakippurim is *mechaper* only *lashavim*, only for those who do *teshuvah*. Without *teshuvah*, Yom Hakippurim is not *mechaper*; it’s a total waste of a day. And for that alone - for allowing such a golden opportunity to pass by - Hashem will hold a person accountable. The problem is that when most people begin to think seriously about doing *teshuvah*, they become overwhelmed. If they understand anything about *cheit*, they become completely discombobulated, and they think that *teshuvah* is not going to help them.

In the Navi Yechezkel (33:10-11), Hashem tells Yechezkel to say to Klal Yisrael: כן, אמרתם לאמר כי פשעינו וחטאתינו עלינו, you said, “our sins are upon us, ובם אנהנו נמקים, and we are completely drowning in them, ואיך נחיה, how are we going to live?” Rashi explains: לפיכך אין כסבורין אתם, אתם הפצים לשוב *teshuvah*, therefore, you don’t want to do *teshuvah*, because you think that *teshuvah* won’t help you. You hear that? The people in that generation - not only low lifes, but even the *chashuvim shebahem* - said that we’re in a place that we can’t climb out of.

So Hakadosh Baruch Hu says to Yechezkel: Go tell Klal Yisrael the following statement from Me, חי אני נאם ה' אלקים, I swear, says Hashem Elokim - *middas harachamim* and *middas hadin* - אם אהפץ כי אם בשוב רשע מדרכו, I don’t desire the death of the *rasha*, במות הרשע, what I want is for a *rasha* to do *teshuvah* and live. וחייה, שובו שובו, do *teshuvah*, Hashem says, ולמה תמותו בית ישראל, why should you die? Hashem says, if you do *teshuvah* you’re going to live. Hashem doesn’t want the *misah* of a *rasha*. He wants him to live.

It’s a *peledike zach*. You know what it says here in this *passuk*? That really, *cheit* is *misah*. If a person is drowning in *cheit*, he is drowning in many *misos*. No one was drowning in *cheit* more than Elazar ben Durdaya, and he definitely thought he couldn’t do *teshuvah*. And that was what he was told by people: “You can’t do *teshuvah*. You’re not going to change.” If you think that you can’t change, you don’t want to try. You don’t attempt it.

But Hakadosh Baruch Hu says: For people who understand less, and even for somebody who understands *vus is cheit*, even for somebody who understands that *cheit* is *misah*, *teshuvah* works! They are not like people who think, “Nah, I’m not going to do *teshuvah*. It’s not so bad.” They understand what *cheit* means. But they should still believe they can change and that they can do *teshuvah*.

## TESHUVAH IS TECHIYAS HAMEISIM

I want to tell you that Rav Yonason Eibshutz, in the *sefer Ya’aros Devash* (חלק א דרוש י) says a very interesting point.<sup>1</sup> The second *brachah* of *Shemoneh Esrei*, is called the *brachah* of *techiyas hameisim*. He says: I want you to know that *teshuvah* from a sin is *b’geder techiyas hameisim*. You have to *daven* to Hakadosh Baruch Hu that Hakadosh Baruch Hu should be *mechayeh meisim* and He should *mekabel* your *teshuvah*. When a person sins, he says, his *neshamah* leaves him. Therefore, he should *daven* to Hakadosh Baruch Hu for *techiyas hameisim*. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is *morid tal shel techiyah*. He should *daven* to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, “I want to be *zocheh* to *tal shel techiyah*.”

A *bachur* says, “How can I change? I’m in the *reshus* of the *yetzer hara*. I’ve tried so many times.” The answer is, you never were *zocheh* to *techiyas hameisim*. You made little movements but never “got off the train.” You have to *daven* to Hakadosh Baruch Hu in the *brachah* of *techiyas hameisim* this *kavanah*, ונאמן אתה, להחיות מתים. Hashem says: Even though you’re *taka a meis*, even though you’re drowning in sin, *af al pi ken* you could have *techiyas Hameisim* and be able to change. Hashem sent a special *nevuah* to Yechezkel - tell Klal Yisrael, *chay ani*, if you do *teshuvah*, I’m going to bring you *techiyas hameisim*. That’s what a person has to know. *Teshuvah* is equivalent to *techiyas hameisim*. When you look at a *ba’al teshuvah*, you’re looking at *techiyas hameisim*.

People say, “I never saw *techiyas hameisim*.” But I saw *techiyas hameisim* many times. I’ve seen *meisim* too - without *techiyah*. I’ve seen people go off the tracks, *mamash meisim*. People don’t even realize - even physically, *teshuvah* makes a difference. If you ever

<sup>1</sup> ויאמר זאת לאחר סיום ברכת מחיה מתים כי גם זה בכלל מחיה מתים להחזיר בתשובה רשעים כי הם מתים אמיתיים ועל ידי תשובה הם חוזרים להיות חיים וזוהיא תחיית המתים אמיתית וכמו שתחית המתים תהיה מה ועל ידי טל כן קבלת רשעים בתשובה הוא על ידי קב"ה שחותר חתירה כי המלאכי שרת מקטרגים ומחיה אותם על ידי טל אורות שלו לחדש נשמתם אשר היא מסואבת ופגומה ועל ידי טל ירחץ צואת בת ציון וישבו לראות פני אלהים וזוהיא תחיית המתים ולכך אחי ורעי כמה יקר בעיניכם לומר זה מחיה מתים ומעשה אליהו ואלשיח הוא ממבחר שבפלאים שהחיה המתים ודבר זה בידכם לעשות כל רגע ושעה להשיב רבים מעון ולהחזיר טועים לדרך הישר וזוהיא תחיית המתים המובחרת כי מה נפקה מינה בגוף אשר תחלתו מטיפה סרוחה וסופו למקום רימה ותולעה אבל עיקר התחיה לנשמת אדם אשר היא נר אלהים וכתבה חושך ולא אור בעברו את מצות ה' ויש לה מיתה עצמית ועל ידי החזרה בתשובה ושמוע לקול מוכיח תשוב רוח לדגנה וחיה תחיה ולכך אמרו (פסחים סח) צדיקים בידם להחיות מתים כל שעה ורגע והיינו כמ"ש לכן בבקשה מאתכם קיימו מצות ואהבת לרעך להוכיח עמיתו ואמת כי רוב המוני עם אינו מקיים מצוה זו ואינו אוהב לנפשו גם כן ואיך יאהב חבירו יותר ממנו אבל אמת זו היא כוונתו גם כן אם יוכיח לחבירו גם ידיו לא תפעל רע וכי.

want to see what it looks like, look at people who have done *teshuvah*. I used to compare pictures. I used to tell people who became *frum*, “Could you bring me a picture from before you became *frum*?” There’s a young man who went off the *derech*, and then he came back. He thought he was Mr. Shtatzy guy. He brought me a picture of before and a picture of now. I told him, “Take a picture right now, on your phone. Take a picture and set it up side by side.” The first one looked like it was taken in a morgue, as if the guy was already dead, and a police camera came to take pictures of him. I told him, “Do you see the *chiluk*? One is a *chai* and one is a *meis*.”

Look at all the *ba’alei teshuvah* – they’re smiling. It’s amazing. Not long ago, I was looking at a picture of a Belzer *ba’al teshuvah* who used to be a model. He was an Israeli. He had a very high position in Israeli intelligence during his army service. Then he became a model, a runway model. He went all over the world, to Paris, London, and New York. And then he became *frum*. Today, he has a beautiful blond beard, beautiful *peyos*, and a *shtreimel*. He looks like a million bucks. I’m looking at the picture and my wife says to me, “They don’t look like the same person. I don’t believe this is him.” I said, “I don’t believe it either.” She said, “What do you mean you don’t believe it?” I said, “This is a picture taken when he was a *meis*. This was a morgue picture. And this is a picture of a *chai*.”

When a person loses his *neshamah* - that’s what happens when the guy is a *rasha* - it reflects itself in his face. His whole *panim*, his *ohr panim*, is gone. He might look young, but he doesn’t look alive. This guy was a beautiful model. They had a whole bunch of pictures of this beautiful model. But they all looked funny. They all look *toite* pictures, like a dead person. That’s what they look like.

### BELIEVE THAT TESHUVAH WORKS

A person has to know that everybody has to make changes. אין בי הדבר תלוי אלא בי, “the matter depends only on me.” You have to make a decision, “I want to change.”

The Rambam writes something very interesting in *Moreh Nevuchim*.<sup>2</sup> It’s a *chiddush* to most people. If you don’t believe in *teshuvah*, if you don’t have *emunah* that *teshuvah* works, it won’t work. You must have *emunah* in *teshuvah*, the Rambam says. The Rambam writes a whole *shtickel*. If you’re not *ma’amin*, it does not work. A person has to believe that teshuva works and it will help.

<sup>2</sup> זה נאמר באופן דומה גם במשנה תורה בה' שגגות פ' ג', וז"ל: אין יום הכפורים ולא החטאת ולא האשם מכפרין אלא על השבים המאמינים בכפרתן. אבל המבעט בהן אינן מכפרין בו. כיצד. היה מבעט והביא חטאתו או אשמו והוא אומר או מחשב בלבו שאין אלו מכפרין. אף על פי שקרבו כמצות לא נתכפר לו וכשיחזר בתשובה מבעטתו צריך להביא חטאתו ואשמו. וכן המבעט ביום הכפורים אין יום הכפורים מכפר עליו. לפיכך אם נתחייב באשם תלוי ועבר עליו יום הכפורים והוא מבעט בו היה זה לא נתכפר לו וכשיחזר בתשובה אחר יום הכפורים חייב להביא כל אשם תלוי שהיה חייב בו.

Even if a person feels he could technically change, but he doesn't believe doing teshuva will help - he thinks Hashem won't wipe away his *aveiros*, teshuvah won't work for him. That's what a person has to know.

A person has to understand, Hakadosh Baruch Hu does not expect him to become a *tzaddik* overnight, but He expects him to do *teshuvah*. How do you do *teshuvah*? If you look in all the *sefarim*, you don't stand a chance from now until Yom Kippur to do *teshuvah*. You could move the Empire State Building faster than you can do *teshuvah* from now until Yom Kippur! It says: מכל חטאתיכם לפני ה' תטהרו, "you shall purify yourself from **all** your sins before Hashem" (Vayikra 16:30). How can you change all your *aveiros*? What does Hakadosh Baruch Hu want?

### STEP 1: MAKE A KABALAH TO CHANGE

So number one, you should make a *kabalah* to change. I want you to speak it out. "Hashem, I am going to change myself. I'm not going to remain as I am. I'm not going to remain in a state of *misah*. I'm going to make the changes that I can." That's step number one.

If you want to remain the same as you were, you could just as well sleep through Yom Kippur. It's a waste of time. You know what it means to get a little bit of cleanliness? You know what it means to be *zocheh* to a little *taharah*? It's the difference between *misah* and *chaim*. That's what it is. Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, that's the first thing. אין הדבר תלוי אלא בי. I am going to change.

And don't stop saying that. It's not a one-time shot, saying, "I'm going to change." You don't say, "I'm going to go on a diet for one day" and hope to lose weight. It doesn't work like that. You've got to say it every day, and every morning, and every afternoon, and every night. And if you stop after a couple of days, it's over. Say: "I'm going to change. I'm going to change." Instead of being apathetic and saying, "Ach, let me just say I'm committed."

### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Now, why do so many people fail? You know why? They fail for the following reason - because they behave without any *da'as*, and they don't do *teshuvah* the right way. What's the right way? The *passuk* in *Mishlei* (19:2) says, גם בלא דעת נפש לא טוב, without a *da'as*, a *nefesh* is *lo tov*, וְאָץ בְּרַגְלָיִם חוּטָא, a person who hurries with his feet is a *choteh*.

*Zugt* the Vilna Gaon, you know what it means וְאָץ בְּרַגְלָיִם חוּטָא He explains that *raglayim* refer to your *middos* because when a person is *margil* himself (accustoms himself) to good *middos* that

becomes his second nature. If a person has bad *middos* that's his *raglayim*. He has to change them, but, says the Vilna Gaon, צריך לילך במידות מדרגא לדרגא כמו הולך בסולם. You have to go step by step, like someone who is going up a ladder. ולא יקפוץ למדרגה שאינו ראוי לה, and you can't jump to a *madreigah* that you're not *raoy* for.<sup>3</sup> When you go up a ladder, you can't run or skip steps. Maybe you can go up a little quicker or slower, but it always has to be one step at a time. I never saw a guy take two steps at a time on a ladder. Even firemen go up a ladder one step at a time. If a person goes too quickly, that's called an אץ ברגלים, and the *passuk* says about such a person he's a *choteh*. That means to say he will be lacking any *hatzlachah* he wanted to achieve because he stands no chance of changing, כי יפול ממנו, he'll definitely fall down. You hear that?! Such a person is undertaking a war in which he can't be *matzliach* - so he's going to stay in exactly the same place where he is right now.

It's so important to determine what the first baby step will be. And then you have to keep climbing one step after the other. If you take one baby step and you climb off the ladder, that's not called climbing the ladder. You have to keep taking the steps.

Then the Vilna Gaon explains the next *passuk*. The next *passuk* says, אַנְלֵת אָדָם תְּסַלֵּף דְּרָפוּ וְעַל ה' יִזְעַף לְבוּ, a man's foolishness corrupts his way, and then he gets angry at Hashem. The Vilna Gaon explains this as follows. Chazal say that הבא לטהר מסייעין אותו, if someone comes to purify himself, they assist him from *shamayim* (Menachos 29b). Sometimes a person undertakes to learn Torah and do *mitzvos* and then he quits. You know why? Because he feels it's too hard and he's not getting *siyuah* (assistance) from *shamayim*. So he gets angry at Hashem. You know what he says? "Hashem, it's not fair. I wanted to change. I was *haba letaher*. You didn't help me." And the *emes* is, do you know why he didn't get *siyuah*? It's because of אַנְלֵת אָדָם, his own folly, his own *tipshus*. Because a person has to go *lefi madreigaso*; he can't jump. And if he does, he is not going to have *siyuah*. That's frightening. He is not going to have *siyuah*. You know why? Because he never began to work on *darko*, **his way**. He never took steps, he never took the proper *derech* to make a change in his life. He cried. Maybe he even banged his heart. He went to the *mikveh*. He did good things, but it's not *derech hateshuvah*. Step one of *derech hateshuvah* is to change slowly and steadily. But he didn't do it *beyishuv hada'as*. He didn't do it right, so he didn't get *siyuah*, and then he gets upset with Hashem. You hear that?

## GRADUAL, SIGNIFICANT CHANGES

The first thing you have to do is to undertake to make a change. What a person has to think of are the fundamental *aveiros* - that's

<sup>3</sup> כשירגיל האדם במדותיו הטובות הן נעשות לו כטבע, אך צריך לילך במדות מדרגא לדרגא כמו הולך בסולם, ולא יקפוץ למדרגה שאינו ראוי לה.

where you have to make gradual changes. If a person is a big *choteh*, a guy who is a *frier* person, comes to me and says, "I want to make a change." I say, "What do you want to do?" He says, "I want to wash *negel vasser*." That's not a change. You've got to make a change. People want to light Shabbos candles. That's not a change. That's cute. It's nice. But that's not the beginning of a change. You've got to go to the fundamentals. Start with the *mitzvah* of Shabbos. Or start with the *mitzvah* of *talmud Torah*.

I had a story with a fellow who I thought was holding by making a *kabalah*. I went over to him on Yom Kippur and said, "Did you make any *kabalos* yet?" He said, "No." I said, "I'm going to suggest to you a *kabalah*. Be *mekabel* to learn five minutes every single day of the year, by day and by night. Every day. Not in your mind, but action." A few minutes later, he comes over to me and says, "I can't do it. Most days, okay. But I can't do it every day." He started thinking of days when he might not be able to do it - Pesach, Yom Kippur. He started thinking of Motzei Yom Kippur, times when he might be running and rushing. "What if I have a *chasunah* that night? What if I have a date?" All kinds of *shtus* the guy had. Five minutes, I asked for. So I said, "Okay, I have another one for you. Be *mekabel* to learn for five minutes every single day, including Erev Pesach, Erev Rosh Hashanah, and Purim. Every single day. Five minutes during the day, not the night." He thought about it and said, "I can't do it now." He was already learning much more than that. But he was honest, and he wasn't joking around. When some people say they're going to learn every day, you know what that means? *Lokshen*. "I will learn every day - except the days I don't learn." That's a *kabalah* that has no teeth to it. He said he couldn't do it. I said, "That's sad. That means you're not even willing to take the tiniest step in *limud haTorah*."

Could a person sit down by a *seder* and say, "I'm going to learn 15 minutes *beretzifus* (continuously, without interruption) each *seder*?" "Every time I sit down to learn, I'm not going to learn less than 15 minutes *beretzifus*?" So one guy says, "Sure, I can do that. If I'm not in the mood to learn, I just won't start learning." Brilliant fellow! (sarcastically). No, what it means is that every time you sit down to learn, you remind your *chavrusa*, "This is my policy. I took on a *kabalah* this year. When I start to learn, for the first 15 minutes, I'm not available. I'm only available to learn." Not, "I'm hungry." Not, "I have a headache." The *yetzer hara* is going to try to stop you, trust me. "Do you want to hear a *shtickel* news from me? You don't want to hear what happened? Okay, I won't tell you!" "Okay, okay! Just tell me quickly, then go *vaiter*." None of that.

There are some *balebatim* who don't think about learning. It's not even on their radar, "I don't learn. My son-in-law learns. My son learns. They learn *for me*." They don't realize that *limud* Torah is an *ikar*. And for the *yeshivah bachur*, his big weakness, his Achilles heel, is his learning. Hashem says, "I gave your parents *parnassah* to support you. I gave you clothing. I gave you room and board. Why don't you sit and learn? You're not interested." That's a biggie.

Then there's another biggie: *lashon hara*. A major biggie. And you get so many *aveiros*, so fast. And you don't even think twice when you say something or hear something. Have you ever thought about that? Make a *kabalah*. Take a time slot in the day and be *mekabel* to work on it.

### THE SECRET FOR KEEPING KABBALOS

I'm going to tell you what the problem with these *kabalos* are: I can guarantee you before thirty days are up, you'll forget what your *kabalos* are. I'm not saying you'll only forget to do your *kabalos*. You'll even forget what the *kabalos* were. Do you understand? "The one I picked this year, I don't know. I'll listen to the tape again and I'll tell you what I picked." That's sad. Why is it like that? Because you never made a decision to change. You just wanted to be *yotzei* and fool Hashem on Yom Kippur, so you said, "I'll do this." But you didn't have any intention of stopping to talk about someone at any time of the day for a few minutes. A person has to be *mekabel*. It's got to be a *kabalah*, a small *kabalah*.

I'll tell you how to make your *kabalos* work. *Kabalos* work if every single day you are *mekabel* your *kabalah* again. If you're *mekabel* it for thirty days in a row, you stand a chance to do it for another thirty days.

A person goes into the street. Everybody says, "How tough it is, the *shemiras einayim* out there. It's *geferlach*." I'll tell you a small *kabalah* you can do. Each time before you go out to the street, or to the airport, or to places where there are a lot of people, to a supermarket, say a little *tefillah*. Say, "Hashem, I'm walking into a *makom* of *sakanah*. *Hoshieini*, save me." Say it! You're *mekabel* that for the first five minutes when you walk into the store, or when you're in the street, you're going to be *shomer* yourself. Just five minutes. Is that a lot? No, it's not a lot. If you don't do this every time, you'll forget about it, and one day, you're not going to even remember that you had such a *kabalah*. But after making an ongoing effort you could tell Hashem, "I committed to change."

Let's say you're very weak on *brachos*. Most people are. So think which *brachos* are *deOreisa*? *Bentching* is a *deOreisa*. *Bentch* out loud. Say, "I'm going to *bentch* out loud," or, "I'm going to *bentch*

from a *bentcher*.” It’s very hard to *bentch* from a *bentcher* because you actually have to pick yourself up, your whole self, and you have to walk *pachos midaled amos* to pick up a *bentcher*. Can you imagine that? Then you have to pick up your hands and actually open up the cover of the book, and you have to remember what part of the book it’s in, whether it’s in the beginning or in the end. You have to search for *Birkas Hamazon*. After you find it, you feel tired like you did *bedikas chametz*. By the time you’re ready to start, you think, “I don’t have time for this.” You have to realize that it’s a small thing. It’s a small move but if it is a real *kabalah* - you’ll change. If you know you’re *shvach* on how you make *brachos*, so you’ll be *mekabel* to make *brachos* out loud. Not all day, some of the time. Say, “Every breakfast, I can make *brachos* aloud.” Nobody should be embarrassed. Maybe when you’re at a *chasunah* and you’re making *brachos* out loud you’re embarrassed. Maybe when you’re in a restaurant and you’re making *brachos*, you’re afraid to make the *brachos* out loud.

### A MASTERCLASS IN NETILAS YADAYIM

I was in a certain restaurant once. A *rav* took me to a restaurant in Florida, a *milchige* place. And I saw a *bachur* there. It was a fancy place. They had this big, old wine bottle that they constantly filled with water, and you filled your cup from it. And then there was this little well, and you washed into the well. There was this young *bochur*. His mother wasn’t wearing a *sheitel*. She wasn’t even dressed *tzniusdik*. This boy was a *tzaddik*. I mean, the fellow washed *netilas yadayim* like a Brisker! I mean, *be’emes*. I was watching the guy dry his hands. He dried the bottle. He did it low-key. Not a big tumult. I watched him *bentch*. I watched him make *brachos* out loud. At the end of the meal, it started raining. So we were waiting outside together. I turned to him and I said, “Which *yeshivah* do you go to?” He told me he learned in a Lubavitcher *yeshivah* in England. I said, “It must be a good *yeshivah*.” He said, “Why?” I said, “Because the way you washed was a sight to behold.” I turned to the mother and I said, “You should know, you have a very, very special son.”

But most people don’t do that. They don’t care. Especially when you have people around, behind you, in front of you, looking at you, you’re not going to do that. A person has to stand up for Hashem. That’s what a person has to do. Not to lie back and forget about what Hashem wants.

### MAKE A SHARP TURN FROM AVEIROS

Of course, you could have *aveiros* over there and making a *kabalah* in those cases can’t be done with gradual improvement. If a guy has a smartphone, that’s a one-time shot. With that, it’s not *shayach* to say, “I’ll do it slowly. I’ll go on the cell phone instead of five hours a day, I’ll do it for four hours.” No such *shtick*. You’ve got to just kiss it goodbye. You can’t do murder to yourself, and say, “I’ll do it with less bullets a day.” Don’t do that.

Here's a *yeshivah* man, who learns Torah. I said to the guy, "You want to know how you can raise yourself?" He said, "Yeah, tell me." I said, "Do you think you get a bang for your buck out of your learning Torah? Do you feel any *kedushah* from learning Torah?" He told me, "No." I said, "Don't you want to feel *kedushah*? Why don't you feel *kedushah*? Torah is the holiest thing a person has." I said, "You know why? Because you're unaware that you're learning Torah with Hashem. Of course, if somebody asked you, 'Who wrote the Torah?' you'd say Hashem. But you have to be aware when you're learning Torah that you're learning Torah **with Hashem**. That's called learning Torah *bikedushah*." How do you learn Torah *betaharah*? Before you sit down to learn, you know what you say? You think, "Hashem, please be *mochel* me for any *chataim* that I have and allow me to learn Your Torah." That's what you do. These are all small, baby steps. It's not hard.

A person can also undertake that he's never going to *daven Shemoneh Esrei* with less than one *brachah* with *kavanah*. Just one *brachah*. Yes, that's called a significant change! You just changed your *tefillah*. You began a change. If you do it for one day, that's not a lasting change - but at least for one day, you made some difference.

### WHAT MAKES A LASTING KABALAH?

You have to understand, Rav Yisrael Salanter said you've got to be *mekabel* the easy things, the *devarim kalim*. You have to change yourself, the *bechinos hakalos*. That's what you've got to do. Make the changes in *devarim kalim*, but do it in a way that you'll succeed. Make yourself a *shomer*. Call somebody else up. You have a lot of friends. Find a friend who is willing to help you and say to them, "I'd like to check in with you every two days, just to remind myself that I'm actually remembering that I have *kabalos*." Is that a hard thing? No. You know what that shows? It shows that you really want to change. Let's say a person wants to lose weight. You know what they do? They get a mentor. They get a coach. They get a guide. They get a sponsor. If people want to change from being an alcoholic, they get somebody who is going to help them out. You can also do that if you're serious about changing. That's all. Tell your friend, "Just remind me I have *kabalos*."

All you have to do is the *kabalos bebechinos kalos*. Small, easy things. Don't even think about the things you did in the past. If you ask me, that's what I'll tell you to do. Just think about the future. "I'm going to change. I'm going to change." And show Hashem that you're actually planning on making this change stick for more than five minutes. Not, "Hashem, I'm going to be good until I get home after Yom Kippur."

## HAVING A KABALAH SAVED HIM

What do you do if you fall? You know what you do? No, you don't 'go to church.' That's not what you do. You don't bug a rabbi either, because he's not a priest, and he can't give you absolution. Now, if you need a *rav*, you know when you call him? **Before** you do an *aveirah*.

I once had a *talmid*. Before the guy became *frum*, he was a *rasha*. He was trying to compete with Rabi Elazar ben Durdaya. That was his job. Then he started to become *frum*. And he told me, "Would Hashem accept a finger instead? I'm willing to offer Hashem a finger of mine." He said, "I will cut a finger off and give it to Hashem, because I know it's not *shayach* for me to do *teshuvah*. It's not *shayach*. It's my life. It's my everything. It's my *chaim*. It's my *maves*. I don't live for anything else." He exercised for hours a day. He ate five meals a day. The guy was muscle-bound and muscle-built. He had muscles from his ears to his neck, his shoulders, his arms, his hips were all sculpted. He had to look impressive. I told the guy, "Hashem doesn't want any *korbanos* from you. You're going to have to change your life."

I remember he said something. One Yom Kippur, I got him pumped, and he decided, okay, he's going to make small changes. Then, on Chol Hamoed Sukkos something happened. I'll never forget this. Every time I walk into my yard, I think about it. I went on a trip on Chol Hamoed with my family. It was before the days of cell phones, or at least before the days when I had a cell phone. I come home, and the guy is pacing the driveway. He comes running up to the car, "Where were you?! Where were you?!" I told him, "Take it easy, buddy. It's Chol Hamoed. I went with my family on a trip." "How come you didn't come home before?" The guy was really agitated, and he had a funny way of showing it. I said, "First, take it easy. Take a deep breath." "No, I can't take a deep breath. Now that you're home, I can take a deep breath. Okay. I am taking a deep breath." I said, "What's going on?" He said, "I almost fell." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I went for a job interview. I was dressed for Yom Tov. I was dressed all nice." In those days, he used to put a little gel in his hair to make it look special. He went for a job interview, and got called into an office. There was a lady there going through his file, looking at his resume and his papers, and she said to him, "Where did you grow up?" She said, "You know, I was in your class." She said, "If you want the job, you got it. But you've got to go out with me now. Let's go out. Let's go have a meal. Let's go have some fun." He said, "Boom!" He said, "I felt that *yetzer hara* coming at me. What are the chances of this happening?" He told her, "Could you excuse me for a moment? Let me step out a minute and freshen up." He walks out of the office.

He said, "I ran out of that place so fast. I got into my car. I'm coming to your home and you're not here, and I started banging on your table." (My house door is always open.) He said, "I was banging on the table, screaming, 'Where is he? It's wrong! Now when I need him, he's not here.'" The guy was *mamash* worked up. That kind of guy can get worked up. I came home, and he attacked me. I said softly, "Come here." He said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Come here." I gave him a hug. I said, "You're a *tzaddik*. You're a *tzaddik*, my friend." He said, "I'm no *tzaddik*. I almost fell." I said, "But you didn't fall. You didn't come to me tomorrow morning with your eyes all droopy and say, 'I fell.' You came to me beforehand." I said, "I have a new respect for you." I said, "Do you know who you are? Is it *shayach* for you not to do it? You told me yourself it's not *shayach*. But you stood up to the *yetzer hara* when the fire was burning in you. You made a *kabalah* on Yom Kippur, and less than ten days later, on Chol Hamoed, Hashem gave you a challenge - *mamash* of who knows what proportions - and you passed the test, my friend. You're on the way to *techiyas hameisim*. You're on the way to change. Now, it may come again. The next one might be harder. The *yetzer hara* ain't going to let you go. You're a member of very good standing. It's like the mafia. If you don't get involved with them, they don't bother you. If you get involved with them, they don't let you go. You've got to know that."

And the guy broke himself. I saw what it means to have *techiyas hameisim*. But you've got to start with small *kabalos*. And you've got to keep the *kabalos*. He remembered his *kabalos*. I'm shocked he remembered them. Most *yeshivah bachurim* don't remember from Yom Kippur to the middle of Sukkos. They say, "I have a short memory. That was weeks ago, wasn't it?" "No, it was less than a week ago." "Was it? Was it that recent? I was standing on Yom Kippur and making *kabalos* to Hashem and writing them down. I didn't throw the papers out after Yom Kippur. Oh, I left them in my notebook somewhere in the *yeshivah*." Rabosai, you don't realize that's not changing your life. You've got to make *kabalos* that can stick.

## **STEP 2: DELIBERATELY POSITION YOURSELF IN A GOOD DIRECTION**

Don't think of the past. Think of the future. This is the second thing Hashem wants: Be *mesyatzev al derech tov*, position yourself on a good path. That's all. If Hashem testifies about you that you're committed to change, and this is the beginning of change, that's called *teshuvah*. Even though you're not holding at the point where you're ready to say, "I'll never do the sin again." When you say, "Hashem, I'm making changes in my life. I'm going to step up, I'm putting my foot on the ladder, and I'm starting to climb, one step at a time."

Everybody tells me afterwards, "Don't push it. You've got to go slow." I say, "'Slow' doesn't mean 'backwards.' Slow means: Slowly moving forward

one inch at a time. You constantly put one foot in front of the other. That's what you do when you move forward. And in a very short time, you can be a different person. Thirty to forty days is all it takes to become a different person. You can *mamash* be *mecholel mofsim*. You could be a miracle performer and a miracle experiencer in thirty to forty days. Just stick to your guns. Make Yom Kippur count.

If you know you're a *ka'asan*, say, "Hashem, I'm *mekabel* to work on *ka'as*." It's not easy. You don't get over *ka'as* in one day. No. It takes years. You've got to take a step. You may be selfish, and you want to overcome your selfishness. Say, "Hashem, I'm going to start doing *chessed*." What you do is, you start acts of *chessed* a couple of times a day. It's not that hard to do, but it's an awareness. It's having a consciousness and awareness for it. That's how people become *frum*, because they change. They make a commitment to change. They don't become *frum* overnight. They make a commitment to change. They take the steps, baby steps hopefully, so they don't go too fast. Those baby steps eventually become very great accomplishments.

### GET HELP BEFORE, NOT AFTER

Let each and every one of us undertake to make *kabalos*. You have a problem sitting. You have a problem focusing. Go for help. If you don't go for help, that means you don't want to change. Again, let's say a guy is a *ka'asan*. "I can't help myself!" That means, he doesn't want to change. If you want to change, why don't you go to somebody for help? If you have an addiction to something, get help. Why don't you ever seek help? You know why? Because you don't want to change. "I'll change on my own." You can't change on your own! It's not possible. You can't do it. אין הבוש מתיר עצמו מבית האסורים. You can't do it. You've got to get help. Get the help **before** and take the steps that your helper tells you to take. That's all Hashem wants to see.

Can you imagine a guy becoming *frum* on his own? You can't become *frum* on your own. You need somebody to guide you. You need somebody to take your hand and help you become *frum*. To help you make the baby steps. Keep that small piece of paper where you wrote all your *kabбалos* until you remember them - sometimes people have a very difficult time remembering things.

I'll tell you a good idea. Why don't you start this afternoon? It's not a bad idea to show Hashem you mean to change. "Well, not today, Hashem. In two days, I'll change. But right now I want to stay the same." Like one guy who told me that he wanted to become *frum*. He was *mekabel* that he wanted to become *frum*. But the week before he became *frum*, every single night he went out and he ate worse *chazir* than the night before. I mean, I never saw anything like it. He was telling me the names of the stuff. One day it was shellfish. The next night it was something else. He ate all types of *treifos*. I told him, "That's not how you change." But that's what he did.

And he really struggled afterwards to become *frum*. It was a struggle. It wasn't easy.

Rabosai, commit to change. Then next year, when we're sitting here, we'll be able to say, "We're not sitting with the same people we were sitting with last year. We're sitting with people and talking with people who have changed themselves." And the people listening will be able to say - "*Baruch Hashem*, I'm not the same person I was last year."

Now, while you're going through the changes, you can't see yourself changing. You have to realize this. That's the *metzius*. You will think, "It's not working. I'm struggling." But if you push ahead, once you are on the other side of the bridge, you'll look back one day and you'll see, "Wow. I've covered a lot of ground. I changed my life."

*Gemar chasimah tovah* to you and all Am Yisrael!

### ❧ IN SUMMARY ❧

Sometimes, when we face doing *teshuvah*, we are already overwhelmed before we begin. If we are less sensitive to sin, we say, "What's the big deal if I don't do *teshuvah*." If we are more sensitive to sin, we say, "*Aveiros* are so bad - how can *teshuvah* possibly help me?" Yet, in both cases, Hashem expects a person to do *teshuvah*, and live. Therefore, we have to learn how to do *teshuvah* and make ourselves into better people. Here are some pointers for making *kabbalos* that last: Believe that *teshuvah* works! Repeat again and again: "I am going to change." Do *teshuvah* in a way that you will get assistance from Hashem: Make sure it is "*darko*" - don't make a too-big jump. Choose to work on fundamental *mitzvos* such as the *mitzvah* of Shabbos, *talmud Torah*, or *shemiras halashon*. Make sure you remember your *kabbalos* by having a *kabbalos* buddy. This week (*bli neder*), I will choose a *kabbalah* to help me change in the coming year, and I will remember it by having a *kabbalos* buddy or saying three times a day, "I want to change!"

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