

D'var Torah:

Nitzavim

Office of The
CHIEF RABBI

Two steps to achievable teshuva



Here's a question for you. What is not over the heavens, not over the seas but in our mouths and our hearts to do?

This is how Parshat Nitzavim describes the mitzvah of teshuvah, of penitence. It is so apt that we read this portion on the shabbat immediately preceding our new year, Rosh Hashanah.

Rav Meir Twersky asks: Why in our mouths and in our hearts? Why these particular parts of the human form? He explains as follows. There are two great barriers to teshuva.

First of all, I might say that I haven't done anything wrong; that I'm perfect and everything is fine with me. Alternatively, I might say, yes I've done something wrong but other people are to blame so Hashem will forgive me. I'm alright because there are extenuating circumstances. Many of us explain away our errors in his fashion. So in order to correct that, 'beficha' - we have to express 'with our mouth' what we have done wrong. We need to acknowledge with

vidui, with our confession, that actually there's a lot that needs repairing.

Then there is the second hurdle. Perhaps we acknowledge that we've done wrong. However, we feel that we can't correct the situation. Perhaps we're already too old, or maybe the sin is too great and we feel that God is not going to forgive us, or we've been repeating it so often, or perhaps other people aren't available in order to assist us. That's why the Torah says 'beficha uvilvavecha' - 'in our mouth and in our heart'. Within our hearts we need to have the right feeling, the right recognition of our errors in order to guarantee that we will change our ways for the better.

Just before the Torah tells us that it is with our mouths and our hearts to perform we are told 'ki karov eilecha hadavar' - 'this matter is close to you'. It is achievable.

Let us not shirk our responsibility and let's guarantee that this year we will utilise the forthcoming High Holy Days to correct everything that is wrong and to guarantee that we will receive the full blessing of Hashem in the following year.

I wish you all shabbat shalom and shana tovah.

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