

## CHAPTER 6

### HOW TO CURB PERSONAL HATRED: THE FORGIVENESS - TESHUVA METHOD

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The Forgiveness-Teshuva method is a three-step program which includes (i) granting unrequested forgiveness to the perceived aggressor; (ii) a path to Teshuva vis-à-vis HaShem; (iii) a preventive formula to anticipate and neutralize the impact of the *yetzer hara* on our primitive brain.

The Forgiveness component is a '*b'diavad*' (after the fact') approach based on Rav Dessler's<sup>1</sup> "indirect method" of fighting the *yetzer hara*. It applies to the situation where Shimon was deeply offended by David's comment about the length of his *tzitzit*. Shimon retaliated by avoiding David and his reaction fits the Chafetz Chaim's definition of hatred: "...even if someone does not say or do anything against another person, but merely refuses to talk to him, he violates the prohibition against hating others." It is also consistent with the hatred definition from Sanhedrin 27b, where the hater does "not speak with his fellow for three days out of enmity." Although Shimon has lived with his hidden hatred for some time, he can still repair his situation through the path of forgiveness (that's why it's called a '*b'diavad*' approach).

#### HALACHIC RATIONALE FOR UNREQUESTED FORGIVENESS

I address Shimon with the following rationale:

By avoiding David while you harbored negative feelings, you put yourself in a strict *ben adam-la-Makom* situation since only Hashem and you are aware of your negative feelings. You now have a unique opportunity to turn your situation around and improve your relationship with HaShem. All you need to do is to forgive David "in your heart," even though he did not apologize (he can't apologize since you did not disclose to him your feelings!). Your forgiveness

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<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Eliyahu E Dessler, *Michtav Me'Eliyahu (Strive for Truth!)* Vol II, Part 4 (Feldheim Publishers, Jerusalem Israel, Nanuet, NY, 1989,1994), 56.

is “*lifnei HaShem*” since only HaShem is aware of your negative feelings. All you need to do is commit to forgive David, stop avoiding him, and eliminate your negative feelings.

This approach works because it follows Chapter 2 of Hilchot Teshuvah where Rambam writes the components of teshuvah in this order: (1) distancing oneself from the *aveirah* he did, (2) regretting his past, and (3) accepting upon himself—with HaShem Himself as witness—that he will never return to this *aveirah* again.”

Rabbi A. Levin<sup>2</sup> justified this sequence saying that “arousing within oneself a true sense of *haratah* is a formidable task...Therefore, the Rambam cautions a person to first distance himself as far from the *aveirah* as he can get—*azivat hachet*. When one no longer stumbles in sin, he can seriously begin to contemplate the seriousness of his deeds and reach a true level of sincere and heart-piercing regret. Only then –when a person has reached a true level of real *haratah*—is he able to contemplate accepting upon himself that he will never return to this *aveirah* again, in a manner where HaShem Himself can testify that it is said in truth.”

Rabbi Levin also writes that<sup>3</sup> “if one only manages to do part of the teshuvah process, it is worth something” and “...even one part of the steps of teshuvah helps a person immensely.” We know that granting unrequested forgiveness is not easy, and to assist Shimon, the next section provides a rationale as well as some tools.

## **SHIMON, YOUR REACTION WAS NOT RATIONAL AND WAS UNFAIR**

1. The speed of your reaction indicates that you did not take time to consider David’s intentions, and since you didn’t speak to him, you have no evidence that he intended to mock or hurt you. In fact, since he is your neighbor and teaches one of your children, it is highly likely that David had no motivation to mock you but intended to give you friendly advice, perhaps awkwardly.
2. Instead of evaluating what David said, you made a judgement of his character and personality. This is a well-known cognitive bias (“Fundamental Attribution Error”<sup>4</sup>) where we

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<sup>2</sup> Rabbi A Levin, *Knocking on the Gates of Teshuvah* (Mosaica Press, 2022), 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>4</sup> “Human psychology is prey to several cognitive biases that interfere with a fair assessment of material being presented to them” in Rabbi Daniel Z Feldman “False Facts and True Rumors” (Maggid Books, New Milford, 2015), 55.

assume “that any glimpse of another’s personality is a complete picture of the individual.” Your decision to avoid him is not fair since it is based on perceptions, biases, and assumptions.

3. By harboring hidden hatred, you lost your compassionate empathy (*rachmanut*) toward David and became “*achzar*” (insensitive) toward him (see Chapter 2). That’s a disproportionate form of retaliation: there is no moral justification for unleashing “the nuclear weapon of the mind” because of a comment on your *tzizit*. In spite of that, you consider yourself a victim!

4. As explained in Chapter 1, the lack of rationality in your response testifies to the success of the *yetzer hara* strategy which makes you feel like a victim in order to escape responsibility for keeping a grudge toward David. The *yetzer hara* misled you to think that you are in a one-on-one, *bein adam la-chaveiro* conflict with David when in fact, you are in a strict *ben adam-la-Makom* situation, as explained above. As taught by Rav Dessler,<sup>5</sup> “the *yetzer hara* persuades us into thinking that what *he* wants is what we want. He infiltrates our very essence,” he steals “our very ego.”

### “HALACHIC” AND “MUSSAR” REASONS

In addition to the above arguments, the following halachic and mussar teachings provide reasons for you, Shimon, to forgive David.

#### **(i) HaShem Is In Charge**

The most important reason is that HaShem orchestrated your encounter with David. Sefer Hachinuch enunciates this important principle: “the misfortunes that befall an individual should be understood as a Divine response to this own behavior.”<sup>6</sup> In his words:

- “ *a man should know and reflect that whatever happens to him, good or bad, is caused by the Eternal Lord, blessed is He, to occur to him; from a human hand, from a man’s brother hand nothing can be without the will of the Eternal Lord, blessed is He.*

- *Therefore, should a man inflict suffering or pain on him, let him know in his soul, that his bad deeds were the cause, and the Eternal Lord (be He blessed) decreed this upon him;*

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<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Eliyahu E Dessler, *Michtav Me’Eliyahu (Strive for Truth!)* Vol II, Part 3 (Feldheim Publishers, Jerusalem Israel, Nanuet, NY, 1989,1994), 112.

<sup>6</sup> Sefer Hachinuch Mitzvah 241 cited by Daniel Z Feldman *The Right and the Good* (Yashar Books, Brooklyn NY, 2005), p.104.

- and let him not set his thoughts to take revenge from him. For the other is not the primary cause of his trouble, since it is sin that brought it about.”

This principle has practical consequences: for example, “it is inappropriate to hold anyone else responsible for his misfortunes, regardless of how their actions or inactions appear to be directly related.”<sup>7</sup>

Since hatred feelings are triggered by a perception of threat, shifting one’s focus from the perceived aggressor to HaShem helps facilitate forgiveness. In his sefer on Bitachon (Trust in Hashem), the Beit Halevi writes<sup>8</sup> based on Yeshayahu (51:12): “It is clear from Scripture, that fear of a human being of flesh and blood comes from forgetting HaShem, may He be blessed....If a person would consider that everything that is found in the world is all from Him, may He be blessed.....he would understand as a matter of course that he need not fear any person.” The Beit Halevi also writes that Bitachon will save you from jealousy and from all sins relating to dealing with other people in monetary matters...

Shimon: by focusing on David with resentment and avoidance, you are focusing on the wrong target, meaning that your grudge and retaliation are misplaced since David was only Hashem’s agent. The only remaining issue at present is between you and HaShem, not between you and David. Because Hashem is ultimately in charge of interpersonal relationships, He set up your encounter with David to provide you an opportunity to fix your *middot* of “forbearance” and “overlooking transgression” (see below). To the extent that you consider yourself a *Yerei Shamayim* (G-d fearing person), you should forgive David since your negative feelings are misplaced and David is the wrong target.

### **(ii) “Why Should I Fix What Is Someone Else’s Fault or Damage?”**

Regarding Shimon’s situation, the *sefer Tomer Devorah* states that a person should not say “why should I fix what is someone else’s fault or damage?” Instead, a person should emulate the Middot that Hashem uses in His behavior toward us based on the commandment

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> HaGaon Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik of Brisk: Essay on Bitachon (Art Scroll Mesorah Publications, Ltd, Rahway, 2020) Perek Dalet.

*“Vehalachta Bidrachav”*<sup>9</sup> “And you shall go in His ways.” As mentioned in Chapter 3, *Vehalachta Bidrachav* is the source used by Rambam (Hilchot Deot 1:5) and Sefer Hachinuch (Mitzvah 611) for the obligation to rectify our character traits (called Tikkun Hamiddot). Two such middot are highly relevant to your situation:

a) *Nossei Avon* (He Bears Sin)

The sefer *Tomer Devorah* explains that the attribute *Nossei Avon* (He Bears Sin) refers to Hashem’s great degree of forbearance and patience after a person sins: “Hashem bears and endures the sin” until the person makes teshuva. Based on Hashem’s forbearance toward us, “a person should learn from here tolerance to endure the burden of his fellowman and the evil that he does.”<sup>10</sup> When a person is victimized by an insult or injury, “and the victim controls his anger and bears the damage until it is repaired, he awakens Hashem’s Attribute of mercy expressed by ‘He bears sin,’ bringing that element of mercy into the world.

b) *“VeOver Al Pesha”* (He Removes Iniquity)

The attribute *“VeOver Al Pesha”* (He Removes Iniquity) refers to the fact that “when a person sins, Hashem Himself, not through an intermediary, fixes his crookedness and washes the filth of his sin.” From this Attribute, we learn that “when a person suffers damage whose results continue to disturb him” and the offender does not repair it, “the victim is forced to repair the damage himself.” “If the injured party then shows his moral fiber and repairs the damage with his own hands, and not through an intermediary, he rises to a high moral level. He awakens Hashem’s Attribute of mercy expressed by ‘He removes iniquity,’ bringing that element of compassion into the world.” When people personally repair the damage that others did to them, Hashem repays them in kind. He cleanses by Himself, and not through an intermediary, the sins of the Jewish people to purify them...”

Application

Accordingly, Shimon, you should reject the notion that by forgiving David you are somehow “fixing” his mistake. By forgiving David, you emulate HaShem’s attributes of *Nossei Avon* (forbearance), and *“VeOver Al Pesha”* (He Removes Iniquity). Forgiving should not be viewed as

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<sup>9</sup> Tomer Devorah by Rabbi Shmuel Meir Riachi (Feldheim Publishers, Nanuet NY and Jerusalem Israel, 2015), 30-34.

<sup>10</sup> Note that, since we emulate Hashem, Tikkun Hamiddot transforms Hashem’s behavior toward us (Bei Adam LaMakom) into our behavior toward each other (Bein Adam LaChavero).

taking somebody else's blame! On the contrary, by forgiving, you refuse to surrender to David the power to control your life! You free yourself from any lingering bad feelings such as stress, anxiety, bitterness. According to sefer *Tomer Devorah*, you rise to a high moral level.

### **(iii) "Vatranut" "Yielding To Others"**

1. Rav Chaim Kanievsky's guide *Orchos Yosher* describes the virtue of "*Vatranut*," which means "yielding to others". He explains that it takes a generosity of spirit for someone to accept insult without anger. He writes: "A person who is accustomed to constantly yield to others saves himself from hatred, conflict and agony. He is included among those about whom our Sages have said: Anyone who "relinquished his measures " [meaning, he does not measure out retribution against those who wrong him], the Heavenly Tribunal 'relinquishes' all of his sins for him (Rosh Hashanah 17a). Overlooking the offenses of other people and "relinquishing one's measures" is an indication of wisdom; a fool never gives in. Regarding this, our Sages stated: If one person is righteous and one is wicked, who yields before whom? The righteous yields before the wicked—for the righteous person consistently gives in (Taanit 16a). The trait of obstinacy—an unwillingness to give in—generally stems from arrogance. A person thinks that if he gives in, his prestige will be diminished, but the truth is the exact opposite (see Kiddushin 71b)...Fortunate is he who always yields in every disagreement, and thereby avoids resentment and conflict. By forgiving David and not insisting on retribution, you demonstrate wisdom, and you will merit that the Heavenly Tribunal 'relinquishes' all of your sins.

2. Sefer Hachinuch wrote: our Sages "greatly praised a person who can achieve a compromise between two parties to a controversy; to him the verse applies: "*Render truth and a judgment of peace* (Zechariah 8:16)" and "*And David rendered judgment and righteousness to all his people* (II Shmuel 8:15; what is judgment with which there is righteousness? You must say: a compromise settlement."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Sefer Hachinuch Mitzvah 233 citing Sanhedrin 6b

3. The Kalever Rebbe wrote:<sup>12</sup> “When a person is insulted and remains silent, he sweetens all the judgements that are upon from the Heavens. Hashem responds to our actions “*middah keneged middah*,” measure for measure. When we feel wronged and overcome that emotion without punishing the offender, Hashem responds with the same forgiveness towards us for the times we have transgressed and thereby insulted His Honor.

As Chazal taught (Rosh Hashanah 17a), whoever forgoes his reckonings with others for injustices done to him, the heavenly court in turn forgoes punishment for all his sins. As it says (Micah 7:18), Who forgives iniquity and passes over the transgression..." Hashem "passes over" and overlooks the sins of those who overlook the insults done to them by others.”

#### **(iv) “Middat Chassidut” (Pious Behavior)**

Forgiving David is akin to the forgiveness that Rambam calls “*middat chassidut*”<sup>13</sup> (pious behavior), where a person forgives the other party in his heart without admonishing him if he believes the other party would not benefit from the rebuke.<sup>14</sup>

#### **(v) David Did not Forfeit his Basic Right to Dignity and Love**

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch taught that even if David intended to insult you, he did not forfeit his basic right to dignity and love:<sup>15</sup> “It teaches us how to relate to those of our brothers who forgot their duty when relating to us and we might think that by misbehaving they have forfeited their right to dignity and love since their behavior is liable to provoke feelings of hatred in our heart. Such feelings are natural in a heart not sensitized by the Torah, but they must not arise in our hearts.”

#### **(vi) Shimon Can Use Ready-Made Prayers For Unrequested Forgiveness**

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<sup>12</sup> The Kalever Rebbe Parshas Ki Sisa 5783

<sup>13</sup> Hilchot Deot, 6:9

<sup>14</sup> Because they are simple minded or with an unsound mind

<sup>15</sup> Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch on Vayikra 19:17

As a final suggestion to help Shimon forgive David, Chazal have composed two prayers, *Tefillah Zakkah* and *Shema SheAl Hamittah*, which highlight the significance of granting an unrequested forgiveness.

### *Tefillah Zakkah*

This prayer composed by Rabbi Avraham Danzid is said on erev Yom Kippur. It states:

*I extend complete forgiveness to everyone who has sinned against me, whether physically or monetarily, or who has gossiped about me or even slandered me; so, too, anyone who has injured me, whether physically or financially, and for any human sins between man and his neighbor – except for money that I wish to claim and that I can recover in accordance with halachah, and except for someone who sins against me and says, ‘I will sin against him and he will forgive me’ – except for these, I grant complete forgiveness, and may no person be punished on my account.*

*“And just as I forgive everyone, so may You grant me favor in every person’s eyes so that he will grant me complete forgiveness.”*

### *Shema SheAl Hamittah*

You can find this tefillah in the Art Scroll Sephardic Siddur (p. 340-341):

*Master of the universe, I hereby pardon and forgive anyone who angered or antagonized me or who sinned against me—whether against my body, my property, my honor, or against anything of mine; whether [he did so] accidentally, willfully, carelessly, or purposely; whether through speech or deed; whether in this transmigration or another transmigration—I forgive every Jew. May no man be punished because of me. May it be Your will, Hashem, my G-d and the G-d of my fathers, that I may sin no more. Whatever sins I have done before You, may you blot out in Your abundant mercies, but not through suffering or bad illnesses. May the expressions of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart, find favor before You, Hashem, my Rock and my Redeemer. “*

The notes on this tefillah indicate that in the merit of forgiving those who have wronged him, one will be granted long life (Mishna Berurah 239:9).

## **SECOND STEP: TESHUVAH COMPONENTS HARATAH AND VIDDUY**



After granting forgiveness, Teshuvah is the next step of the Forgiveness-Teshuvah Method. It includes the other components of regretting the sin (*haratah*) and confessing the sin (*viddui*).<sup>16</sup>

### **Barrier to Teshuvah**

Rambam writes: “Don’t say that teshuvah is only relevant to sins that were performed through actions, like immorality, robbery, and stealing. This is incorrect; rather, just like one needs to do teshuvah for those aveirot that have an action, so too does one need to search and find the bad middot within himself and do teshuvah for anger, hatred, jealousy, mockery ....From all of one’s middot, one needs to return to Hashem in teshuvah. These attitudes of poor character are worse than the aveirot that have an action, as when one is steeped in bad middot, it is very difficult to separate from them.”<sup>17</sup> Regarding this Rambam teaching, Rabbi A Levin<sup>18</sup> explains that, unfortunately, we tend to reserve the expression “*baal teshuvah*” for individuals who did teshuva for bad actions, and tend not to use it for a frum person from a frum family who “just improved his character deficiencies. It is this sort of mistaken notion that the Rambam wants us to remove from our mindset...

### **Regret (*Haratah*)**

#### Goal

Rabbeinu Yonah<sup>19</sup> explains regret as follows:

“You should understand in your heart that it is terrible and bitter that you abandoned Hashem and sinned by violating the Torah prohibition and harboring hatred in your heart... and say to yourself: “What have I done?”

One must feel terrible that he violated the command of his Creator, and he should strive to reach a level of embarrassment in front of HaShem. We should say to ourselves: I did not use the soul of life that is wise hearted and of fine intellect that Hashem blew in my nostrils.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Shaarei Teshuvah Shaar 1:10; 1:11; 1:40

<sup>17</sup> Rambam, Hilchot Teshuva, 7:3

<sup>18</sup> Rabbi A Levin, Knocking on the Gates of Teshuvah (Mosaica Press, 2022), 150-151

<sup>19</sup> Shaarei Teshuvah Shaar 1:10

<sup>20</sup> Shaarei Teshuvah Shaar 1:10

For Rabbi H Kleinman,<sup>21</sup> “There has to be real remorse in a person’s heart. When we think about what we have done, we should feel, without reservations, ‘I wish I could rewind this film and do it all over again differently.’ Part of that sense of regret springs from fear; there is an acute realization that G-d is watching and meting out justice, and that no unrepented sin goes unpunished.” Regret and remorse fuel the desire for teshuvah and the commitment toward change.

### Focus on HaShem

In order to feel regret that you violated the command of your Creator with your initial hatred, you must focus on HaShem. In doing so, you reverse the *yetzer hara* ruse that shifted your attention away from “*ben adam la-Makom*”<sup>22</sup> to “*ben adam la-chaveiro*.” We already learned that because the Torah focuses on hatred hidden in your heart, the prohibition has an essential “*ben adam la-Makom*” character since only Hashem and you are aware of your feelings. In addition, let’s recall the Sefer Hachinuch principle which taught that focusing on the perceived aggressor is an error.

### Regretting the Corruptive Effects of Hatred

Shimon, you should naturally feel regret for the broad range of corruptive effects that hatred had on you and on your *avodat* HaShem (as discussed in detail in Chapters 2-5). They are just listed here to help your memory:

1. You lost your *rachmanut* and developed *achzaryiut*
2. You Violated Four Additional Torah Commandments
3. Hatred Corrupted Your *Limmud HaTorah*
4. Hatred Precluded Your Acceptance of the Yoke of the Heavenly Kingdom (*Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim*)
5. Hatred Corrupted Avodat HaShem With Your *Lev* and *Nefesh*

### **Not Repeating the Sin (*Azivat Hacheit*)**

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<sup>21</sup> Rabbi H Kleinman, *The Power of Teshuvah* (Mesorah Publications Ltd, 2016), 210.

<sup>22</sup> As soon as nascent hatred erupts, a hater is still in the category of *ben adam la-Makom* since only Hashem and the hater are aware of the hatred feelings.

Implicit in granting forgiveness to David and regretting the sin is the commitment not to repeat the sin (*azivat hacheit*). That is described below in the Preventive Method.

### **Making a Proper Vidduy (confession) for Hatred**

Rambam and Rabbeinu Yonah consider Vidduy an essential component of teshuva and a Biblical mitzvah-obligation ("*mitzvat assei d'Oraita*"). Rambam bases this mitzvah on verse Bamidbar 5:6-7,<sup>23</sup> while Rabbeinu Yonah uses verse Vayikra 5:5.<sup>24</sup>

"Vidduy transfers teshuvah from the realm of amorphous thought into reality...One must view himself as if he is actually standing before HaShem acknowledging that by sinning he has rebelled against the King and that he is asking forgiveness...Vidduy is the act of conversing before a loving God in which one acknowledges that he has sinned thereby creating a divide between himself and God. The result of the Vidduy is to remove the sin so that he can come close to the Almighty."<sup>25</sup>

"When a person says Vidduy, he needs to say the following words: "*Hattati*" (referring to aveiros done by mistake), "*Aviti*" (referring to sins done intentionally), and "*Pashati*" (referring to rebellion against HaShem)<sup>26</sup>....The opinion of the Rosh, Tur, and Shulchan Aruch is that when one says vidduy, he does not need to specify which *aveirah* he did...Even so, it is nevertheless proper (even according to this opinion) to quietly specify which *aveirah* one did."<sup>27</sup>

Rabbeinu Yonah points out that, in order to obtain a higher level of atonement, one should combine Vidduy with Tefillah,<sup>28</sup> which is a fervent prayer to obtain forgiveness of our sins and to have our previous good deeds accepted.<sup>29</sup>

## **THIRD STEP: PREVENTIVE METHOD ALLOWS YOU NOT TO REPEAT THE SIN**

### **Need for Sincerity**

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<sup>23</sup> "A man or a woman who commits any of man's sins...they shall confess their sin that they committed."

<sup>24</sup> "He shall confess what he had sinned."

<sup>25</sup> Rabbi H Kleinman, *The Power of Teshuvah* (Mesorah Publications Ltd, 2016), 222-223.

<sup>26</sup> Rabbi A Levin, *Knocking on the Gates of Teshuvah* (Mosaica Press, 2022), 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>28</sup> Shaarei Teshuvah, Shaar 1:40-43. This is according to the prophet Hoshea: "Take words with you and return to Hashem" Hoshea,14:2.

<sup>29</sup> In addition, Rambam in *Hilchot Teshuva* 7:7, states that your prayers are now heard, citing Isaiah: "he cries out and his prayer is answered immediately".

When Rambam<sup>30</sup> writes “Teshuvah means that the sinner should forsake his sin, leave it from his thoughts, and make up his mind that he will not repeat it again,” Rabbi A. Levin explains the implied level of commitment as follows:

“...to honestly desire never to repeat the *aveirah* again. The Rambam here describes HaShem as the One Who knows the deep secrets of man’s hearts (*yodei’a taalumos*). If a person earnestly seeks to do complete teshuvah, HaShem will reckon that as such, notwithstanding the fact that HaShem knows that in the future the person will stumble again. The main point is that right here and now, the person has committed himself to permanently stay away from the *aveirah*, and that is all that is required.”<sup>31</sup> If such a person who did sincere teshuva “later repeats the *aveirah*, it is counted as a new sin, and it does not invalidate his original teshuvah.”

### **Impulse Control**

The Preventive Method enables you to achieve the following:

- (i) To systematically reject the impulses of anger, resentment, animosity which are typical manifestations of the *yetzer hara’s* takeover of the primitive mind.
- (ii) To distrust the feelings of victimhood and bearing a grudge knowing that the primitive mind makes you over-react systematically to the smallest provocation (most, if not all its alerts of the primitive brain are either arbitrary or false!).

To achieve these goals, training in “Impulse Control” is needed. Impulse control is about self-control. It teaches you how to take on the primitive brain and the *yetzer hara* prospectively and outsmart them by blocking the emergence of hatred. Here is how: As you approach any social situation, you enter it ready for any challenge, or insult, or aggression. As you feel uneasy (challenged or insulted), instead of reacting, you remain calm and ride the wave; you will feel and recognize the primitive mind impulse trying to make you feel victimized, but you don’t trust it systematically. You live in the moment. You don’t allow emotions, or reaction to control you (if need be, focus on your breathing, inhale through your nose and exhale slowly through the mouth).

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<sup>30</sup> Hilchot Teshuvah 2:2

<sup>31</sup> Rabbi A Levin, Knocking on the Gates of Teshuvah (Mosaica Press, 2022), 23

Then you use your rational mind to remind yourself that:

- If you feel hurt, offended, humiliated, ignored, snubbed, disrespected, you systematically don't trust and ignore those feelings. Why? Because they are false. They are created by the primitive brain and the yetzer hara based on a false and distorted perception of threat.
- If you fail to comply with the above, you will fail to comply with our *chamamim's* wisdom because any negative feeling you harbor would be totally unwarranted and therefore "*chinam.*" You would be held guilty because you would have ignored your trust (*bitachon*) in HaShem and given priority to your pride and your bruised ego.
- As a G-d-fearing Jew/ess, are you willing to sacrifice your avodat HaShem and your kirvat Elokim (closeness to HaShem) each time you encounter a disagreeable person or situation? The answer is obviously No! But unfortunately, that's what occurs when we harbor ill feelings following an unpleasant get-together.
  
- In addition, remember that hatred is more destructive to you, the hater, than to your hate target because harboring hatred is equivalent to "grasping a burning coal hoping to use it to harm someone else. "

### **Impulse Control Works**

Impulse Control yields positive results for many reasons:

- (i) It becomes easier after practicing unrequested forgiveness with the "B'diavad" method.
- (ii) We realize that the expression "*sinat chinam*" coined by our *Chachamim* contains the key to the remedy for this plague which is the word "*chinam.*" We refuse to harbor the most destructive human emotion for no reason, and we intentionally pre-empt its eruption.
- (iii) Impulse Control works because of the process called "neuroplasticity" which is well documented.<sup>32</sup> Know that in adult brains, synaptic connections are constantly being recreated depending on the activity of the neurons, and neuronal circuits are "re-wired" in response to

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<sup>32</sup> The 2016 Kavli Prize in Neuroscience was given "for the discovery of mechanisms that allow experience and neural activity to remodel brain function."

training (evidence for these processes was found in the brains of Tibetan monks and in the brains of medical students during a 3 to 6 month period of studying for exams).

(iv) We encounter a concrete example of Impulse Control three times a day when we recite the supplication of Mar Brei D’Ravina at the end of the Shmonei Esrei: “*VeLimkalelai Nafshi Tidom*, which translates as “*To those who curse me, let my soul be silent.*” In this petition, we ask HaShem to help us achieve a transformation not just in our behavior i.e., by not responding to those who curse us. We pray for a deep self-transformation occurring at the level of our *nefesh* that will silence any reaction whatsoever. Our goal is to silence the activation of the primitive mind caused by the *yetzer hara*. To achieve that goal, we need to work on acquiring skills such as Impulse Control.

### **Additional Training**

Additional training increases success in minimizing future hatred episodes.

#### Sefer Hachinuch Principle

To achieve the above outcomes, we must always recall and apply the Sefer Hachinuch principle which introduces a fundamental *ben-adam-laMakom* dimension in any interpersonal incident. Accordingly, we remember that the perceived aggressor (a) is not the cause of our negative experience because the “insult” was decreed by HaShem, and (b) he or she was simply an agent appointed to awaken us to repair our *middot*.

#### Working on a Tikkun Hamiddot Program

Such a program has three goals: (i) rectifying negative middot, especially hatred; (ii) acquiring good middot according to our individual needs; and (iii) becoming a Baal Hamiddot. This means acquiring the self-control needed to deploy our middot as required in each situation in our lives.

#### Acquiring Yirat Haromemut (Awe of HaShem)

As proposed by Rabbi Moshe D Kestenbaum,<sup>33</sup> we learn to practice the Rema's teaching "*I have set HaShem before me always* (Tehilim 16:8): "Throughout our busy day, ..we need to stop regularly and put thought into our actions so that our Torah observance does not become divorced of recognition of HaShem's presence."

### Rectifying Avodat Hashem

To succeed, we rely on the fact that the gates of prayer are always open to prayers for spiritual success.<sup>34</sup> We work on improving our "kavanah" during *Shmonei Esrei* by decreasing mind-wandering and attention failures. We focus on the four requests for spiritual needs (understanding, repentance, forgiveness, *gueulah*) and infuse those *berachot* with the feeling of "absolute neediness, a neediness that only G-d can satisfy."<sup>35</sup> HaShem Who looks in the penitent's heart sees a firm resolution to discard his/her evil ways which includes "the personality trait, the situation, or mistaken belief that led him to do wrong." In this way, the person forsakes not just the sin but its root and becomes less likely to relapse.

### **CONCLUSION**

Anyone who made teshuva for violating the Torah prohibition after harboring *sinat chinam* has achieved a huge milestone. By taking responsibility for your hatred-like feelings and making teshuva, you filled your Tisha B'Av and your Yom Kippur with meaning since you are no longer a *sinat chinam* "bystander" during those commemorations. You became a trailblazer who is sovereign over his reactions to routine provocations and interpersonal disagreements whether in the family, or in the community. Most importantly, you diminish the level of *machloket* in your community, and you stop scapegoating innocent Jews to justify your negative feelings and escape responsibility for them.

"Forsaking a sin means revising our self-image, and that is why this is the most difficult part of any teshuvah. Nevertheless, this is the heart of the power of teshuvah. We become better people: people energized by the incomparable joy of having worked hard at teshuvah,

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<sup>33</sup> Rabbi M D Kestenbaum, *Olam HaAvodah* (Mesorah Publications, Ltd, Rahway, NJ, 2021), 210-216.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>35</sup> Rabbi Nosson Scherman, "*An Overview/Prayer, A Timeless Need*" *The Complete Art Scroll Siddur July 1984*, xvii.

spawning blessings, and clearing a path between ourselves and our Creator.”<sup>36</sup> In addition, let’s remember that “Even one individual who does sincere teshuvah has the power to bring the *geulah* closer through his teshuvah.”<sup>37</sup>

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## TAKE HOME MESSAGE FOR CHAPTER 6

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This chapter is one of the most important of this book because it provides you a three-step program called the Forgiveness-Teshuva method.

### FIRST STEP: UNREQUESTED FORGIVENESS

This is a “B’diavad” (after the fact) approach which helps people who, like Shimon, believe they have been victimized and refuse to speak with the perceived aggressor. They harbor hatred feelings and violate the prohibition against hating others. The halachic/mussar rationale for asking a “victim” to grant an unrequested forgiveness to the perceived aggressor is multifold:

(i) The victim is in a “*Bein Adam LaMakom*” situation.

Since this victim has not spoken to the perceived aggressor, only HaShem and the victim are aware of the hatred and the Torah violation. Therefore, the victim can make the first step of teshuva “lifnei HaShem” (distancing oneself from the *aveirah* he did) by granting forgiveness to the perceived aggressor. The victim has placed him/herself in a “*Bein Adam LaMakom*” situation.

(ii) The misfortunes that befall an individual represent a Divine response to this own behavior.

By harboring resentment and avoidance toward the perceived aggressor, the victim is focusing on the wrong target since the perceived aggressor was only Hashem’s agent. HaShem set up the encounter to provide the victim an opportunity to fix his/her *middot* of “forbearance” and “overlooking transgression.”

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<sup>36</sup> Rabbi H Kleinman, *The Power of Teshuvah* (Mesorah Publications Ltd, 2016), 217

<sup>37</sup> Rabbi A Levin, *Knocking on the Gates of Teshuvah* (Mosaica Press, 2022),160



(iii) The perceived aggressor did not forfeit his basic right to dignity and love

When our brothers and sisters forget their duty when relating to us and misbehave, we still owe them dignity and love.

## **SECOND STEP: COMPLETING TESHUVA WITH HARATAH AND VIDDUY**

*Haratah* means regretting the corruptive effects of hatred described in Chapters 2-5: loss of *rachmanut* and emergence of *achzaryiut*; violation of four additional Torah commandments; corruption of *Limmud HaTorah*; deficient *Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim*; corruption of recitation of Shmonei Esrei (with *Lev* and *Nefesh*).

In saying the Vidduy, one needs to say “*Hattati*” (referring to aveiros done by mistake), “*Aviti*” (referring to sins done intentionally), and “*Pashati*” (referring to rebellion against HaShem).

## **THIRD STEP: PREVENTIVE METHOD**

This method takes a “*Lechatchila*” (prospective) approach. It is our ultimate triumph over the partnership between the primitive brain and the yetzer hara. It requires focus to acquire the skill of “Impulse Control” and learn how to block the emergence of hatred. You ignore feelings of being offended or disrespected because you know ahead of time that such feelings of victimhood are created by the primitive brain as an unwarranted response based on a false perception of threat. As a G-d-fearing Jew/ess, you refuse to fall in that trap time and again, and refuse to harbor hatred for no reason (that’s why our *Chachamim* called that hatred “*chinam*”!). Even if hatred erupts, you use your rational brain to forgive (grant unrequested forgiveness) because you refuse to sacrifice your *avodat HaShem* and your *Kirvat Elokim* (closeness to HaShem) each time you encounter a disagreeable person or situation. You refuse to relinquish your independence, always waiting for an apology that will not come because your expectation was based on a false perception.

As a practical example, with training and practice, Impulse control allows you to implement the supplication of Mar Brei D’Ravina at the end of the Shmonei Esrei: “*VeLimkalelai Nafshi Tidom*, which translates as “*To those who curse me, let my soul be silent.*” He prayed to remain silent when cursed for real. In our case, most of the time, the offense is an illusion.

When you block the emergence of hatred, you “walk in HaShem’s ways,” you perform “tikkun hamiddot, and increase unity within your family and community.

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