

THE WEXNER FOUNDATION

THE HEART MECHANICS OF FORGIVENESS

September 2, 2021 | 25 Elul 5781 | Rabbi Elyse Frishman |
Shifting *Din* (Judgement) to the *Chesed* (Kindness) of Forgiveness

1. Night/day 13 Elul

Listening without hearing.

Deciding without understanding.

Leaving before arriving.

Sigh. A whirlwind of confusion.

“Love the Other as yourself.”

וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעִי כְמוֹךָ —v’ahavtah l’rei’echa kamocho.

What does this mean?

רֵעִי rei’echa — it’s complicated:

Neighbor, friend, shepherd, beloved, and
one’s dark side.

How can this be?

The nature of light is to cast darkness.

A true רֵעִי rei’echa is both light and shadow,
goodness and darkness.

Not one of us is without our shadow.

The polarization gripping us thrives
in the shadows we cast.

The only way to love another as myself
is to listen, to pay attention to what’s not aligned
with me.

Here’s how I usually listen:

You speak, and my mind splits off.

I hear what you’re saying through the ear of
what I’m thinking.

I’m absorbing in order to respond

(to show you, teach you, prove you wrong).

Not listening.

When I don’t have the bandwidth
to understand you,
my heart and spirit begin their decay.
It happens when I’m afraid, or when I’m so certain
I’m right.

And I may be right.

And I may have the right to be afraid.

But I’ve found that when I choose to really listen,
I learn something.

I change.

My principle may be undeterred,
but my heart shifts — and then my choices shift.

I open a door instead of closing it.

2. Night/day 15 Elul

Surrender, Elyse.

There's a wicked witch writing in the sky —
she's my 'yetzer hara', trying to confuse me —
declaring that surrender is giving over to her.

So of course, I won't surrender.

But the opposite is true:
not surrendering
Is giving over to that wicked witch.
True surrender is only to the Holy One.

Yes, I read Wicked
and totally identified with the green sister and how
misunderstood she was.
It can be that way with the 'yetzer hara', too —
misunderstood.
We do need her, to love with ardor, create with
passion,
even immerse in faith.

Perversely, she can drive us
to embrace our 'yetzer hatov'.

It's a fine line, surrender:
If passive, it's a giving over to her call
(ok, Haagen Das, you've got me now).
Rather, surrender must be the active giving over to
Goodness and Holiness
(I'm going to the gym right now).

It's not passive
to let go
and
learn
and
discern
what is really needed of one's life.

It's not the gym, of course. It's sacred service.
One's sacred calling.

So surrender is
to listen
actively.
To absorb what one needs to hear.
And then to shift.

That's *teshuvah*.

Though we yearn for the clarity of black and white
(there's no Place like Home)
our world is indeed the Oz of
masterful deceit, power, beauty, danger,
magic and hope.
So tempting.

We can only go Home when we surrender.

Seek the shoes that fit our souls perfectly.

3. Night/day 17 Elul

“Be the giant that you are and step over your pain.”
(Shaman to Tribal Leader, *See*, Season 1, Episode 1).

Or in sacred Jewish words: (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

“I place before you life and death, blessing and curse.
Choose life, that you may live, you and your seedlings;
(live) to love *Adonai Elohecha*,
to hearken to the Holy Voice,
to cleave to the Holy One;
for that is your life, and the meaning of your days.”

Entering these waning weeks of Elul,
my sins shrink me.
My *'treif'* tears me.
There's too much me, and not enough Holy One.

My heart yearns
to soar,
to skip into the light of holiness.

To not be damaged goods, broken-hearted.

There is no greater blessing than life.
Choose this.

4. Night/day 19 Elul

Why waste time not loving enough?

Surrender to love.

It's the straightest line from me to you, you to me.

Unless it's knotted.

And who does that?

What an acrobatic feat it takes to flip, twist, leap
and roll love into a pretzel!

(unnecessary lies)

(feeling old hurt flare up and feeding it)

(avoiding conflict and feeling in-rage)

(dishing out rage)

(you?)

When God calls out, 'Ayeka? Where are you?'

and Adam says, 'I was afraid and hid,'

that's a leap from faith -- and love.

And when Adam blames Eve for the fruit incident,

that's a leap from love.

Pretzel talk.

Shall we blame it on that first man?

(Well, there would be equity in that. But not
helpful).

Nope. The point is

we are all superb gymnasts of the heart.

Olympic champions of the screw-up.

Why why why?

Today we hopped with our granddaughter.

I met an old friend and laughed, so happy to see
her.

Hugged my deliciously pregnant, brilliant daughter-
in-law.

Listened to my first-born share how moved he was
by an article on grief.

Kissed my man.

We all ate peach pie.

Shabbat shalom.

It rained a bit, was a touch too cold, we were
exhausted.

Nu?

Shavua tov.

Each day this month, I've been thinking about
missing the mark.

Too often, so careless, unnecessary.

Each day, I ask why.

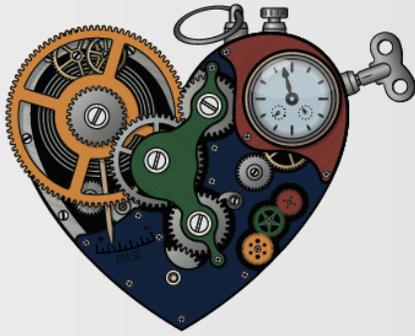
No answers outweigh love.

So, Elyse, get over it all.

Eat another slice of the pie of love.

Just

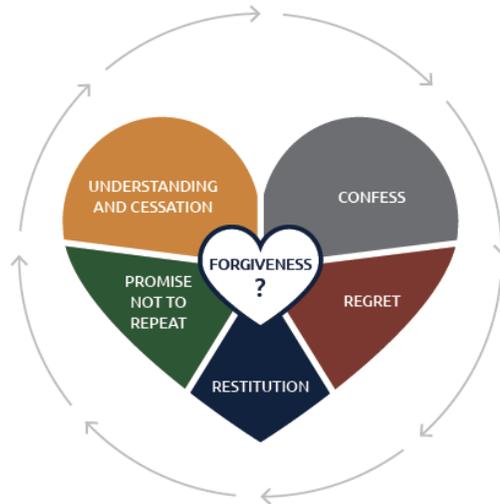
Enjoy it.



THE HEART MECHANICS OF FORGIVENESS

ELUL SERIES

Steps of Teshuva/תשובה Repentance: The Process of Turning (Paraphrased from Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah)



Understanding/Havana הבנה & Cessation/Hafsaka הפסקה

Understand in our hearts that we've done something wrong and *cease* the wrong action

Confess/Vidui ודוי

Verbally *confess* the wrong action, giving the act concrete form in our minds

Regret/Charata תרטה

Genuine *regret* of the act; evaluate the negative impact and loss caused by our action

Restitution/Hachzara החזרה

(applied when misdeed is bein adam l'chavero/between people)

Make *restitution* for harm done in whatever way possible

Promise not to repeat/Havtacha הבטחה

Promise never to repeat the wrong action

? Ask Forgiveness/Selicha סליחה ?

Ask forgiveness from those we've harmed for our misdeed

Teshuva/Repentance: The Process of Turning

Source: Sefaria.org (adapted from Yacov Fruchter)

We are now in the season of repentance, *Elul*, which culminates in the High Holy Days - *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*: the days in between known as the "10 Days of Repentance (*teshuva*)."
The source of the word *teshuva* is *lashuv*, to return to one's potential and a just or more correct path of living. Encouragingly, the *Torah* is full of stories of people going "off the path" and attempting to return. *Teshuva* is a process of self-evaluation and self-improvement.

There are two different types of transgressions: *those between a person and God, and those between one person and another*. Jewish law distinguishes between these two forms of "sins" or transgressions as follows:

- "*Bein Adam L'Makom*," between an individual and God, is when the *teshuva* is purely between the person and God
- "*Bein Adam L'Chavero*," is between people, when one has caused harm to others, whether by stealing from them, embarrassing them or anything else, *teshuva* requires that restitution and reconciliation (*hachzara*), be arranged between the parties involved.

Before any Divine forgiveness is granted, the damaged party must forgive the perpetrator.

Forgiveness is up to the victim (and the victim alone). Atonement is up to God.

Forgiveness, wisely, is up to the victim (and the victim alone) for inter-human relations, just as it is up to God alone to grant atonement for transgressions against *hamakom* (the Divine). A person is only obligated to ask for forgiveness three times. After three refusals, *halakha* maintains that the person is no longer held accountable for that action, as they have proven their genuine regret. The person who will not accept a sincere apology after three requests for forgiveness, however, is now guilty of bearing a grudge. So, the tradition simultaneously encourages the deep work of self-scrutiny, communication, and actively making of amends on the part of the transgressor, empathizing with the aggrieved, leaving forgiveness in their hands. At the same time, Jewish tradition also coaxes the aggrieved gently to release their pain, anger, resentment, grudge, no matter how deep the wound.

Judaism leaves the actual mechanics of that release up to us. God models granting us complete atonement on *Yom Kippur*, in a remarkable act of strength and generosity, *gevurah* and *chesed*. We can strive to emulate that grace and magnanimity down here on earth, amongst ourselves.

This series investigates the heart mechanics of how we might actually do that, while acknowledging how painful and difficult the granting of complete forgiveness can actually be. As leaders seeking to better ourselves internally, communally, societally, and globally, we turn to *teshuva*, with our quiet and our enormous hurts and grudges, to right our paths.