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# Teshuvah with Joy

*The Rebbe's Approach to Joy versus Bitterness*

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Based on three teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

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*compiled by Rabbi Avraham Katz*



# Foreword

With thanks to Hashem, I present this essay as an attempt to offer a comprehensive picture of one of the most practically relevant topics in Chassidic thought: the relationship between joy and bitterness in the service of Hashem — according to the approach of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

The Rebbe's teachings on this subject are developed across multiple sichos and maamarim, delivered at different times and in different contexts. Taken together, they form a unified framework that addresses how a Jew in our generation should relate to aveiros, teshuvah, and spiritual growth — specifically from a place of inner strength and joy. This essay seeks to weave these teachings into a single, coherent presentation, and to show how they can be applied in our daily lives.

Following the essay, three of the Rebbe's original teachings on this topic are presented with context, the Hebrew text with nikud, and a conversational English translation, so that the reader can study the sources directly.

Much of this essay is based on my own understanding of the sources. While I have done my best to faithfully represent the Rebbe's intent, there is always a possibility of error in interpretation. I hope that, with Hashem's help, the ideas presented here are at least very close to what the Rebbe actually means to say. The reader is encouraged to study the original texts and draw his own conclusions.

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— Rabbi Avraham Katz, Postville, Iowa

7 Adar 5786, birthday and yahrtzeit of Moshe Rabeinu, who's אהרפשמורתא in our generation is the Rebbe Nosi Doreinu

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## Teshuvah with Joy

### The Rebbe's Approach to Joy versus Bitterness<sup>1</sup>

Based on three teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

**Teaching 1:** *Sefer HaSichos 5749, Footnote 64*

No Need to Fast Shovavim — Already Accomplished

**Teaching 2:** *Maamar: Margela B'pumei D'Rava, Vayishlach 5746*

Teshuvah Through Joy, Not Bitterness

**Teaching 3:** *Likutei Sichos Vol. 10, Parshas Vayigash, Sicha 2*

Crying Can Be Counterproductive — Just Act

### General Introduction: A Revolution in Three Stages

One of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's most revolutionary and practically relevant teachings is that the Jewish people's relationship with suffering, bitterness, and self-punishment has fundamentally changed. Not because the Torah has changed — the Torah is eternal. But because the situation of the Jewish people has changed. The spiritual work of earlier generations accomplished something permanent, and as a result, certain practices that were once essential are no longer necessary — and in some cases, can even be counterproductive.

This idea is developed across three distinct teachings of the Rebbe, delivered at different times and in different contexts, but forming a single unified arc. Each teaching goes a step further than the last. Together, they paint a picture of a revolution in how a Jew relates to sin, teshuvah, and personal growth — from the communal to the individual, from the unnecessary to the potentially harmful.

Stage 1 (Sefer HaSichos 5749, Footnote 64): Communal fasting for past sins is no longer necessary. The earlier generations already accomplished the correction.

Stage 2 (Maamar: Margela B'pumei D'Rava, Vayishlach 5746): Individual bitterness and brokenheartedness as a path to teshuvah is no longer the way. After the immense suffering the Jewish people endured, the path now goes through trust and joy.

Stage 3 (Likutei Sichos Vol. 10, Parshas Vayigash): Crying is not merely unnecessary — it can be counterproductive. It risks creating a false sense of accomplishment, substituting for real action, and weakening the drive to rebuild.

<sup>1</sup> To note: This discussion is mainly about trust in Hashem and joy in the context of a person's service of Hashem in Teshuva, specifically, and in Torah and Mitzvos in general. Regarding trust in Hashem and joy in dealing with circumstances that are beyond a person's choices, see: Likutei Sichos vol. 36 and vol. 3 page 883 regarding trust in Hashem, and vol. 1 page 284 regarding accepting suffering with a joy. Additional sources are referenced there.

## Stage 1: Certain Types of Fasting Are No Longer Needed

The first stage appears in a footnote to a sicha from Parshas Shemos 5749 (1989). The Rebbe explains why the Alter Rebbe — Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad — never once mentions the practice of fasting during the weeks of Shovavim in any of his foundational works: not in Tanya, not in Torah Or, not in Likkutei Torah. He doesn't even mention the word "Shovavim."

Shovavim is the period covering the first six parshiyos of Sefer Shemos, during which it was customary — based on the teachings of the Arizal — for people to fast certain days each week in order to rectify the sin of zera l'vatala. The Arizal revealed specific spiritual corrections tied to these weeks.

The Rebbe's explanation is striking: the Alter Rebbe omits this practice because the correction was already completed. From the era of the Arizal through the Baal Shem Tov and his students, the communal spiritual work was done. Beginning with the generation of Chabad, the community no longer needs to fast during Shovavim. An individual who needs to address personal sins may still fast privately — but the communal obligation has been fulfilled.

Even the Maggid of Mezritch explicitly told his son, Reb Avraham "the Malach," not to fast the fasts of Shovavim.

Crucially, the Rebbe emphasizes that this is not a change in the Torah. The Torah's instructions are eternal. What changed is the condition of the world and the people in it. Consider: the Rambam counts the destruction of Amalek among the 613 eternal mitzvos. But when Amalek is eventually destroyed completely, the mitzvah will seemingly no longer apply — so how can it be eternal? Should it not be classified among the temporary commandments, like the one-time command to anoint Aharon and his sons and the vessels of the Mishkan?

The answer is that a change in situation does not mean a change in the command itself. The command regarding Amalek is: if Amalek exists, we must destroy them. That command stands forever, even after Amalek is completely destroyed — because the command itself has not changed, only the circumstances. So too here: the directive to fast during Shovavim remains valid in principle, but the situation that warranted it no longer exists.

This is the foundational principle: the spiritual condition of the Jewish people can change in a way that makes certain corrective practices unnecessary, without any change in Torah itself.

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## Stage 2: Individual Bitterness Is No Longer the Path

The second stage takes this principle and applies it to the individual's personal teshuvah.

In 5746 (1985), in the maamar Margela B'pumei D'Rava (Shabbos Parshas Vayishlach, 17 Kislev 5746), the Lubavitcher Rebbe stated that in our generation it is no longer necessary to arouse merirus – bitterness – as a structured method in the avodah of teshuva.

At first glance, this appears difficult to reconcile with classical Chassidic teachings – with the Alter Rebbe's extensive treatment of bitterness and crushed-heartedness in Tanya, Iggeres HaTeshuva, Iggeres HaKodesh, and Likkutei Torah, all of which describe merirus as essential to breaking through spiritual blockage and enabling genuine return.

Additionally, even after 5746, the Rebbe himself cried publicly at farbrengens when speaking about the suffering of the Jewish people and the pain of galus. In the final maamar he distributed, Ve'atah Tetzaveh, he discusses the state of being "kasis" – crushed – and how that crushing reveals the deepest light, the ma'or.

How then are we to understand his statement that bitterness is no longer necessary?

### ***Not a Blanket Statement***

The key is precision. The Rebbe did not issue a blanket negation of all bitterness in the service of Hashem. He addressed a specific role that bitterness once played within teshuva – breaking through the barrier around the heart – and explained that this function is no longer required in the same way. The Rebbe never said that a person is not allowed to feel bitter. He never said that a person is not allowed to cry. What he did say is that bitterness is not a necessary component to move forward in learning Torah and doing mitzvos with joy. And that if we make bitterness and crying the major focus – an end instead of a means – it can become a deterrent in the bigger picture.

To understand the scope of what changed, we must first examine the classical model.

### ***The Classical Role of Merirus in Teshuva***

Traditionally, teshuva is understood in three stages: First, regret and firm resolution not to repeat the sin. Second, merirus – being brokenhearted – to shatter spiritual blockage. Third, teshuva ila'ah – intensified connection to Hashem through Torah and mitzvos.

The middle stage served a clear function. When a person sins or becomes absorbed in material pursuits, a blockage forms in the heart. As the pasuk says<sup>2</sup>, we must circumcise the covering around the heart. In Tanya (ch. 28–31), the Alter Rebbe calls this timtum halev – heaviness and coarseness of the heart that dull sensitivity to G-dliness. When a Jew sins or is too preoccupied with material pleasure and desires, it creates a thick barrier around his heart that prevents him from feeling his true love and fear of Hashem. The method for breaking through was for a person to humble himself and recognize how far he has fallen, to come to feel his distance from Hashem, until he becomes truly humbled – and through that contemplation and crushed-hearted humility, the heaviness is broken.

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<sup>2</sup> דברים י, טז.

In Iggeres HaTeshuvah (ch. 7–10), the Alter Rebbe applies this same concept to the teshuvah process itself: after the basic teshuvah of regretting one's sin and committing to do better, a person must first become brokenhearted — teshuvah tata'ah — before he is ready to experience the joy of serving Hashem with greater intensity in a way of teshuvah ila'ah.

Now, in those chapters the Alter Rebbe does not call the blockage a “foreskin.” He refers to it as heaviness or dullness of heart. However, in Iggeres HaKodesh, Epistle 4 (“Ein Yisrael Nigalin Ela B'Tzdaka”), and in Likkutei Torah<sup>3</sup>, the Alter Rebbe introduces a related but distinct model: two stages of circumcision — in the language of the Gemara, milah (removal of the thicker foreskin) and peri'ah (removal of a thinner membrane beneath it). These represent two layers of spiritual concealment — one coarse and thick, one more subtle. Perhaps we can explain the Rebbe's 5746 teaching based on this model.

### ***Milah and Peri'ah as a Framework***

In earlier generations, sin and immersion in material desire could create a thick, hardened spiritual covering around the heart — analogous to the thicker foreskin of milah. This coarse obstruction required intense merirus to break it. The crushing of the heart was spiritually necessary to penetrate that layer. The only way to remove that thick covering was through bitterness and a crushed heart — the circumcision process itself.

However, in our generation, the Jewish people have undergone a profound collective refinement. The suffering endured during the era of the Second World War reached such an unimaginable depth of pain and crushing that it permanently removed the “thicker covering” over the heart of the entire Jewish people for all time.

Based on the Alter Rebbe's model, what remains is more subtle — analogous to peri'ah. The obstruction today is thinner, temporary, and more easily overcome.

Even if a Jew sins, it does not create a permanent, impermeable shell requiring deliberate emotional devastation to break through. The heart is fundamentally open. A person can pivot immediately into Torah and mitzvos with joy.

### ***Why This Matters Practically***

This is not merely a theoretical point. Under the traditional model, a person needed to first circumcise his heart — to break through that barrier — before he could move forward to do more good deeds. If that model were applied in our generation, it would create a serious obstacle to growth for a great many people.

Consider: someone who grew up in a non-religious home and never kept kosher or Shabbos — would he need to first become brokenhearted before he can begin to keep Torah and mitzvos? In truth, this is not the main concern, because such a person is halachically a tinok shenishba — like a child who was captured and raised among non-Jews, who is therefore unaware of the mitzvos. It is not considered his fault that he did not observe them, and it is not considered that he transgressed. So

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<sup>3</sup> לקו"ת פרשת ראה, דף יח עמוד ג-ד, וראה גם ד"ה בעצם היום היום זה תו"א פרשת לך לך ובתורת חיים שם.

even under the traditional model, there would be no requirement for him to become brokenhearted, because there is no sin to repair. His past should obviously not be a deterrent to his moving forward.

The real issue is for people who are already religious to some degree — who know about the Torah and mitzvos, who understand that what they are doing is wrong, and who do it anyway. For them, the constant back and forth of fighting temptation, falling into sin, and trying to move forward again — if every time they fall, they are required to achieve bitterness and become brokenhearted before they can return to their level of observance or advance further — that becomes a crushing and paralyzing deterrent. In a generation filled with so much temptation and confusion, if the focus is on the bitterness requirement to achieve complete teshuva, then a person who is already somewhat religious will not want to move forward. He will struggle to maintain his momentum if every time he commits a sin, he must first become brokenhearted before he can return to serving Hashem with joy.

This, perhaps, is precisely why the Rebbe said we should not focus on the bitterness aspect in the context of teshuva: because for most people in this generation — especially those who are already striving to grow — it will serve as a major deterrent to doing more, learning more Torah, and doing more mitzvos. And since the thick barrier no longer exists, requiring bitterness to break it is both unnecessary and counterproductive.

This does not mean that no one is ever allowed to feel bitterness. It means that making bitterness a structured requirement will, for the vast majority, become a stumbling block rather than a help. Therefore, it should not be the focus.

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### ***The New Middle Stage: Bitachon and Simcha***

In place of merirus as the connecting stage between basic teshuva and higher teshuva, the Rebbe emphasized two elements: Bitachon — trusting Hashem to help us do teshuva and rise. Simcha — serving Hashem with joy and appreciation for the opportunity to connect.

These are not merely tools or methods. They are themselves mitzvos. It is a mitzvah to trust in Hashem. It is a mitzvah to serve Him with joy. Therefore, they must be pursued no matter what — even when we don't feel capable, even when we don't understand why we should trust in Hashem to help us, because we don't trust ourselves. Nonetheless, we trust in Hashem. And we work to bring our neshamah to the surface — because even if right now we don't feel happy to serve Hashem, deep down our neshamah is happy to serve Hashem. The work is to connect that truth into our daily life so that we can actually feel that happiness.

This is the fundamental contrast: bitachon and simcha are not only a method of serving Hashem — they themselves are the service of Hashem. They are an end in themselves. But bitterness is not a mitzvah. It is not a mitzvah to be bitter. It is not a mitzvah to cry. Bitterness is only a method, sometimes appropriate as a natural response to genuinely painful situations — but never something we are commanded to pursue, force, or manufacture. Since bitachon and simcha are mitzvos, they must be pursued even when we don't feel them. Since bitterness is not a mitzvah, it should not be pursued or forced.

Therefore, even after sin, even after involvement in material desire, a person can immediately move forward. He does not need to first crush his heart to “qualify” for growth. He can begin learning more Torah and doing more mitzvos with joy right away.

The first element is bitachon. The replacement for bitterness is not nothing — it’s something equally demanding. “Tracht gut vet zain gut” — think good and it will be good. The positive thought itself generates the good outcome. It’s not wishful thinking; it’s an act of faith so powerful it reshapes reality. The Tzemach Tzedek told a chossid exactly this, and it worked. That is the power of bitachon.

The second element is serving Hashem with joy beyond what you naturally feel. Not the easy kind of joy that comes when everything makes sense. The Rebbe is talking about choosing joy when you don’t feel it — working at it. The Rambam calls this an “avodah gedolah,” a great and demanding service. Even when we have many problems in life and don’t feel excited to serve Hashem, we tell ourselves that we should be excited because it is the truth. The truth is that Hashem is the most exciting thing and doing a mitzvah is the most precious thing in the whole world, and this is what we should be excited about and happy about. Even if right now we are not emotionally charged enough to experience that, at least intellectually we must appreciate it, so that we should want to have that type of joy.

Even the Alter Rebbe himself, in Iggeres HaTeshuvah (ch. 11) and Tanya (ch. 26), interprets the verse “my sin is before me always<sup>4</sup>” as not meaning that a person should walk around miserable. The very next verse says, “Let me hear joy and gladness!<sup>5</sup>” The bitterness was always just a brief moment — never a permanent state. And the Alter Rebbe explicitly says that teshuvah from bitterness is only the lower kind; teshuvah from joy is the higher level.

We’re in the sixth millennium — the cosmic “Friday”<sup>6</sup> — getting close to “Shabbos.” Obviously our avodah should be the joyful kind. On Erev Shabbos, we prepare for Shabbos with joy, not with mourning. We’re almost there; act like it.

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<sup>4</sup> תהלים נא, ה.

<sup>5</sup> שם, י.

<sup>6</sup> ראה שיחת י"ט בקלו' תרס"ג, מאדמו"ר הרש"ב, סה"מ תרס"ג ע' רנו.

### **Stage 3: Crying Can Be Counterproductive — Just Act**

The third stage, from Likutei Sichos on Parshas Vayigash, takes the argument to its sharpest point. Here the Rebbe doesn't just say that crying and bitterness are unnecessary — he warns that they can be counterproductive.

The Rebbe analyzes the story of Yosef and Binyamin's reunion. Rashi explains that Yosef cried on Binyamin's neck because he saw prophetically that the two Temples in Binyamin's portion would be destroyed. And Binyamin cried on Yosef's neck because he saw that the Mishkan in Shiloh, which was in Yosef's portion, would be destroyed. The question is: why did each cry over the other's destruction and not his own? And why did Yaakov, upon meeting Yosef after twenty-two years, not cry at all but instead say Kerias Shema?

The answer: crying is what you do when there's nothing left to do. If you can save somebody, you're not going to sit and cry about how he's dying. If you could do CPR and save his life, you don't sit there crying — you act. Even if he's barely alive, even if his heart has stopped beating — if there is any way, any chance to save him, don't cry. Do something. Only if he's already gone, only when there's truly nothing left to do, only then does crying have its place.

For someone else's spiritual destruction, you've exhausted your options — you can rebuke gently, you can daven, but ultimately their teshuvah is in their hands. You can't force someone else to do teshuvah. If you have a friend or a relative who has stopped keeping the Torah and mitzvos, and it pains you deeply — it makes sense to cry, because no matter how hard you try to convince them, at the end of the day you cannot do their teshuvah for them. It is very painful to see them in that situation. So you cry. But for your own spiritual situation? There is always something more you can do. You can do teshuvah, learn Torah, daven harder, take on another mitzvah. So crying is never truly warranted when it comes to yourself — because action is always available.

Then comes the sharpest point: sometimes crying can actually weaken your ability to act. A person cries, feels the emotional release, and tells himself, "Well, I already cried about it — I've done my part." The crying can become a substitute for action. It can give a false sense of accomplishment. It can calm you down just enough that you stop feeling the urgency to actually do something. If a person cries about his situation and then does not improve it, he is actually worse off than before — because now he has been calmed without having changed. The Rebbe is warning that this is a real risk.

The same danger applies when bitterness is treated as a prerequisite for teshuvah. A person may think: "I cannot move forward until I properly break my heart." For many, that becomes paralyzing — and yet he has not increased in Torah or mitzvos at all.

Teshuva is not about feeling bad. It is about becoming better.

If crying replaces action, it defeats its own purpose. Therefore, since the crushing stage is no longer necessary to break a thick obstruction — and since emphasizing it will hinder rather than help — it should not be pursued as a structured avodah.

The only exception is tears of teshuvah — when the crying itself is the turning point, is the action, is the rebuilding. As the pasuk says, “Place my tears in Your flask.”<sup>7</sup> Those tears are genuine and holy, and they count as real spiritual accomplishment. But even tears of teshuvah cannot be forced or manufactured. They must arise naturally, from a place of sincerity, to be considered holy and positive. A person who deliberately tries to produce tears has not achieved tears of teshuvah — he has only produced a performance.

As we will see, bitterness is holy only when it arises naturally, not when it is pursued as a goal. But in short: don't try to cry, don't pursue crying, don't make crying the objective. Just do something positive.

Yaakov is the father of all the tribes. Both Temples are “in his portion.” So for Yaakov, there is always something he can do. Instead of crying, he said Kerias Shema — the ultimate act of self-surrender to Hashem, which the sicha explains is equivalent to bringing a korban. Yaakov wasn't avoiding the Churban. He was rebuilding the Mikdash in the deepest possible way.

As the Hayom Yom teaches: “One positive action is worth more than a thousand sighs.”

### ***Two Types of Sadness***

Understanding why crying can become a trap requires a crucial distinction. When a person cries about his own situation, the sadness can come from two entirely different sources.

The first is healthy pain. A person may feel genuine pain over sin or over a painful life circumstance. Hashem created pain as a warning system. If we did not feel pain, we would hurt ourselves without even realizing it. Pain tells us that something needs to change. Healthy spiritual pain can motivate change. This type of pain is natural and holy.

The second is self-directed ego sadness. A person may cry because he feels bad about himself: “I am bad. I am worthless. This happened because I am a bad person.” This is not genuine pain over a situation. This is self-inflicted pain that comes from ego or confusion. The animal soul contains four negative traits corresponding to the four elements, as explained in Tanya (ch. 1). From the element of earth comes atzlus (laziness) and atzvus (sadness). Earth seeks the lowest resting position. It does not want to move. Depression in this sense becomes an excuse: “It's hopeless. I am bad anyway. Why try?” The animal soul creates a justification for inaction — a cover-up for laziness disguised as spiritual humility.

Consider: when a person falls and gets hurt, crying from the pain makes sense. But if a person falls and cries because he tells himself, “I must be a clumsy fool and that's why I fell” — who says that's true? Who says he's clumsy? Who says he's a fool? That is self-inflicted pain. It adds a layer of suffering that has nothing to do with the actual fall. The first kind of crying is healthy. The second kind is unhealthy and must be avoided completely.

That sadness is a klipah. A Jew is never inherently bad. He may make bad choices, but his essence is a Divine soul. A person who sins is not a bad person — he is a good person who made a bad choice.

And thinking “I am a bad person” is itself a bad choice — one that can be corrected by choosing to recognize the truth. To believe “I am bad” is a distortion. It removes responsibility and becomes a cop-out for doing nothing. Whether a person cries over his sins and says, “I am so bad because I did this thing,” or whether something painful happens and he says, “This must have happened because I’m a bad person” — both are unhealthy and unholy, because they come from the klipah, not from any place of holiness.

Healthy pain over a mistake can lead to repair. Ego-driven self-hatred leads to paralysis. This distinction is essential in understanding why structured merirus is discouraged in our generation, where confusion between humility and depression is common.

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### ***Joy from the Neshama – Bitterness from the animal soul***

In Tanya, chapters 31 and 34, the Alter Rebbe describes the goal of bitterness as addressing the animal soul, which creates a challenge for the Neshama and blocks it from serving Hashem properly. If we only had a Neshama, a Divine soul, we would only have joy in the service of Hashem, since the Neshama is always happy to serve Hashem. The need for bitterness arises specifically because of the animal soul, which causes suffering in two directions:

First, it creates a painful situation for the Divine soul by blocking it from feeling Hashem’s presence and pulling it into foolish and sometimes sinful behavior.

Second, the animal soul itself is constantly in pain — confused about its real purpose, always pursuing pleasure or honor or laziness, but never truly satisfied.

In Chapter 34, the Alter Rebbe quotes the Zohar: “One side of my heart is full of joy, and the other side is crying in painful bitterness.” This means that both emotions coexist in the Jewish person simultaneously, since he has opposite dimensions within himself – his joyous Neshama and his bitter animal soul.

The goal of bitterness is never to create more of it — but to address and transform the bitterness that already exists within us from the animal soul.

The Rebbe explains<sup>8</sup> that this concept in Tanya — of bitterness and joy coexisting — applies not only to merirus over sins and the concealment of Hashem's presence. It applies to all forms of merirus in general. For example, the verse states, "It is better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting" (Koheles 7:2). The bitterness felt during mourning the loss of a relative — as we will explore further below — is itself a mitzvah. Yet it is not a contradiction to the mitzvah to serve Hashem with joy. Why? Because the bitterness comes from an external painful situation, whereas the joy comes from the intrinsic nature of the neshamah. These are two different dimensions of the person, and they can coexist. And through processing that bitterness in mourning, a person comes to greater joy in the service of Hashem afterward, now that the bitterness from that situation has been released.

The broader principle is this: every time bitterness is called for, it is a needed means to address a pain that exists outside of the neshamah — either in the animal soul or in the circumstances of the world around him. The purpose is always the same: so that the inherent joy of the neshamah can emerge with greater strength and clarity.

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<sup>8</sup> See Tanya HaShaleim, chapter 31, comments of the Rebbe (Kislev 5716; Nisan 5732).

### ***Bitterness: An Outcome, but Not a Goal***

Before examining in detail the specific examples of legitimate bitterness, it is important to state clearly what follows from all three stages of the Rebbe's teaching.

Bitterness and tears are not forbidden. They are in fact a positive thing. It is not bad to feel bitterness over the fact that we have committed sin. It makes sense to feel bitterness, because we love Hashem, and it is painful that we are far from Hashem through the sin. Of course, it makes sense that sometimes we cry because of that pain. If a person occasionally has intense feelings of bitterness and occasionally cries — over the pain of distance from Hashem, over the suffering of galus, over the state of the Jewish people — this is healthy and even holy.

The Arizal teaches that a person who never cries has a spiritual deficiency — because the soul's connection to Hashem is so deep that at certain moments it must express itself through tears. If a person never has any overwhelming feelings for Hashem, this is a serious problem, because the true depth of our connection to Hashem is a very deep, overwhelming feeling. It is therefore a good thing that a person occasionally has intense bitterness and occasionally cries.

But — and this is the crucial point — bitterness and tears are not a goal. They are not something to be pursued, chased, or made into a spiritual project. They should not be something a person intentionally tries to produce. A person should not make it his goal to get himself to cry, to get himself to feel bitter, to get himself to realize how bad he is until the point that he starts crying. That is not the avodah. The goal is the opposite: to pick himself up, to push forward with intense strength, and not to give up and feel like he cannot do anything to improve his situation. The goal is bitachon and simcha — to trust that Hashem will always give him the strength to rise, and to push himself to serve Hashem with joy even when he does not feel it.

Bitterness should be understood as a natural outcome. As a result of a person sincerely serving Hashem, he may occasionally be overwhelmed by feelings that result in intense bitterness and tears. When they come naturally and automatically as a genuine response to a real situation, they are holy. But pursuing them is not encouraged — only acknowledged when they arise on their own.

The Rebbe himself publicly displayed exactly this. Even after the 5746 maamar, the Rebbe cried with bitter tears at farbrengens when speaking about the suffering of the Jewish people and the pain of galus. In the maamar Ve'atah Tetzaveh, he discussed being "kasis" — crushed — and how that crushing reveals the deepest light. These were not contradictions to his teaching. The Rebbe was not pursuing bitterness as a goal. His tears were a natural response to genuinely painful realities — the suffering of the Jewish people, the pain of galus, and the yearning for Geulah. That is exactly the kind of bitterness that is holy: the kind that arises from the depth of feeling, not from a program of self-inflicted suffering.

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## ***Four Examples of Bitterness That Serves a Purpose***

Having established that bitterness is not a goal but can arise naturally, the question remains: what are the legitimate contexts in which it serves a purpose? In all four of the following examples, bitterness is never manufactured — it is processed, channeled, or harnessed toward something constructive.

In some cases, bitterness serves as contrast — intensifying the experience of joy. In others, it provides release — preventing toxic levels of grief and pain from overwhelming us. In still others, it channels yearning — transforming the soul's ache into focused, intense action. But in every case, bitterness is a means to an end, not the end itself.

As we have established, we are never commanded to create bitterness. We are commanded to create simcha. Joy is something we are obligated to build, to cultivate, to choose. Bitterness, by contrast, is something that already exists — and Torah teaches us what to do with it.

### ***1. Maror on Pesach — Bitterness as Contrast<sup>9</sup>***

The mitzvah of maror is not that we should feel bitter. It is not even that we should cry — on Pesach, unlike Tisha B'Av, there is no requirement to cry at all. The maror only represents the idea of bitterness. We taste the bitterness and contrast it with the joy of redemption. Our bitter past contrasted with our better future — and because the past was so painful, the joy of freedom becomes even greater. We realize how good it already is that we came out of Mitzrayim and have the Torah and mitzvos, and how tremendously good it will be when Mashiach comes. As it says, yisron ha'or min ha'choshech<sup>10</sup> — light is greater when it emerges from darkness. The bitterness of slavery already exists in Jewish memory. The maror does not create it. It recalls it, and by recalling it within the structure of the Seder, it intensifies the joy of freedom through contrast.

This is why there is no independent Torah commandment to eat maror. Biblically, maror is eaten only together with the Korban Pesach and matzah. The bitterness exists only within the context of redemption.

In essence, bitterness cannot be an end in itself — it is only a means to an end, a method by which joy becomes enhanced and magnified through contrast. Even today, when maror is rabbinically mandated and we recite the brachah “asher kid'shanu b'mitzvosav v'tzivanu al achilas maror” — even so, it never stands alone: we first eat matzah, then maror, then korech — maror physically sandwiched between two pieces of matzah — and we conclude with matzah (afikoman). The bitterness is always surrounded by redemption, both in the chronological order and in the physical sandwich.

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<sup>9</sup> See also Sicha of Parshas Beshalach 5752, where this concept is applied to Miriam and the women's role in Az Yashir. Because the women experienced deeper bitterness in Egypt over the loss of their children, their joy at the redemption was correspondingly greater — illustrating how maror serves as a contrast that enhances the joy of Geulah.

<sup>10</sup> קהלת ב, יג. וְרָאָה תִּנְיָא פְּרָק כ"ו.

It can only exist when sandwiched between elements of joy. Within the context of pursuing joy, that is the only way that bitterness can be a valid method in the service of Hashem — in that it amplifies our joy. The goal of the Seder is not bitterness. It is joy. The maror serves the joy.

## ***2. Tisha B'Av — Bitterness as Release***

The pain of exile and the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash are realities that already weigh on the Jewish soul. The bitterness we carry over galus is so intense that if we do not release it, it can reach toxic levels in our system. If that grief is never expressed, it quietly poisons everything else — suppressing our ability to serve Hashem with genuine joy the rest of the year.

Tisha B'Av provides structured release: a designated time to feel the full weight of that pain, to sit on the floor and cry while reciting Eicha and the kinos, to mourn what was lost. By expressing the grief fully on one day, we drain it from our system so that it does not dampen our joy for the rest of the year. The purpose of the mourning is not the mourning. The purpose is the joy that becomes possible once the grief has been properly released.

And unlike personal bitterness over one's own sins, bitterness over galus is not paralyzing — it is motivating. We can work to end our own inner exile — and with Hashem's help, that personal transformation contributes to the complete redemption of the entire Jewish people. But in an immediate sense, we cannot end the exile ourselves. And so it makes sense to feel pain over it. Yet when you realize that true closeness to Hashem requires Mashiach and the Beis HaMikdash, the bitterness over galus will not stop you from serving Hashem with joy — in fact, it will motivate you to learn more Torah and do more mitzvos because that is what will bring the Geulah faster.

## ***3. Mourning for the Deceased — Bitterness as Processing***

When a person loses a close relative, the grief is already there. It is not manufactured. The pain is so deep that if not released through crying, it can reach toxic levels, mentally and emotionally. Halachah provides a structured process — shivah, shloshim, the year of mourning — to allow that grief to be expressed and processed so it does not become destructive. A person should cry during the first three days, because if he doesn't, that grief stays inside and has no way to be released properly, creating mental and emotional damage.

The tractate of mourning ends with the promise that Hashem will swallow up death forever and wipe away tears from every face<sup>11</sup>. This teaches that death, destruction, and mourning are not ends — they are temporary stages. Even death itself is only a means to an end. When that purpose is accomplished, there will be no more death, no more destruction, and consequently no more crying and no more mourning. The final state is not tears. It is joy.

## ***4. The Soul's Yearning for the Infinite — Bitterness as Yearning***

There is a fourth example of bitterness that is not halachic but deeply rooted in Chassidic and Kabbalistic teaching. The Arizal teaches that whoever does not cry on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur or during any of the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah (the Ten Days of Repentance), his soul is not complete — because the soul's bond with Hashem is so deep that at certain moments it overwhelms the

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<sup>11</sup> ישעיהו כה, ח.

intellect and must express itself through tears. The idea of crying is that it expresses something beyond what the mind can contain, and therefore comes out as tears.

This is not the bitterness of sin or of loss. It is the bitter yearning of the neshamah for the Infinite — the pain of distance from the Ein Sof. The soul, whose nature is to rise and cleave to its Source, feels the ache of concealment. This too is a holy form of bitterness. But it is not created. It arises from the soul's own depth. The neshamah already yearns — the tears are its overflow.

And even this yearning, powerful as it is, remains a means and not an end. In the language of Chassidus, it is ratzo — the upward surge of the soul toward Hashem. And the purpose of every ratzo is the shov that follows — the return downward to draw G-dliness into the world through Torah and mitzvos. The yearning must lead somewhere: to more intense revelation of Hashem in this world, to greater commitment, to action.

This is precisely why simcha holds a fundamentally different status. Simcha is not ratzo. Simcha is itself shov. Joy in serving Hashem, joy in Torah and mitzvos, is not a means to some further end — it is the end. It is the revealed presence of G-dliness in human life. It is the state of Geulah tasted in the present. Bitterness, even the holiest kind, points beyond itself. Simcha is what it points to.

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### ***What about the old model of merirus – does it apply at all?***

Someone can ask:

So, based on what you are saying, that the old model of merirus in Teshuva is canceled, why are we learning about it in the Tanya, chapters 28-31, and Igeres HaTeshuva, chapters 7-10? Isn't everything in Tanya meant to be applied?

A possible answer, in two parts:

- 1- It says in Pirkei Avos (4:10): “והוי שפל רוח בפני כל האדם,” which means that we must be humble before every person. This is directly relevant to our question. A person should always see others as having a spiritual advantage over him that he can learn from and apply in his own life. He should attribute his personal spiritual success to Hashem's assistance, and his own spiritual shortcomings to his own bad choices. But when judging someone else, he should think the reverse: whatever that person accomplished was through his own hard work and effort, and his spiritual shortcomings are not really his fault. Since arrogance is a terrible attribute that is completely opposite of everything Chassidus teaches us, we need to work hard to cultivate humility. Learning those chapters of Tanya that address merirus is a very helpful tool in cultivating a healthy sense of humility.
- 2- Later in Pirkei Avos (6:6), it says that one of the traits crucial to Torah understanding and application is “המכיר את מקומו,” which means “to recognize his ‘place,’” meaning his spiritual situation. A person who has unrealistic expectations of himself cannot serve Hashem properly. If he thinks he should be a Tzadik, he may expect never to have bad thoughts — and when they inevitably come, he becomes depressed by his perceived spiritual failure. But this

is foolish, because it's not a realistic expectation. He needs to recognize that Hashem created him with a yetzer hara and that Hashem specifically wants him to have a regular, healthy yetzer hara, with all its foolishness, and to fight it. At the same time, if someone has learned a lot of Torah and made some progress in his service of Hashem, he should hold himself to a higher standard of observance than he did when he was less knowledgeable in Torah. He should ask himself: "How am I progressing in serving Hashem? Am I living up to realistic expectations, or am I being lazy?" Learning these chapters of Tanya on Merirus helps us ask the honest questions needed for proper introspection, which leads to spiritual growth.

So, while we do not pursue merirus as a required step in teshuva, the study of these chapters remains essential for developing the self-awareness and humility that are prerequisites for genuine growth.

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### **What This Looks Like in Practice**

What would this approach look like in action? It depends on the situation. Here are six common scenarios:

1. **Struggling with temptation to sin:** A person needs to remind himself that Hashem is watching him and that Hashem is relying on him to pass this test, which was only given to bring him closer to Hashem. And Hashem gives him the strength to overcome this temptation and to pass the test.
2. **Correcting and moving forward after sin:** If he already sinned, he should tell himself: even though I made a bad decision to do this thing, I believe that next time I can do better, because I have a neshamah that is always connected to Hashem, and so deep down I really want to overcome this and Hashem will give me the strength to do better in the future. For now, I can't let this mistake lead to more mistakes. Instead, I need to push myself to learn more Torah and do more mitzvos with enthusiasm, because that is what will make me even stronger in the future to overcome this challenge. And serving Hashem with joy is itself a mitzvah!
3. **Experiencing genuine pain over distance from Hashem:** A person may feel a deep ache — a sense that he is far from where he should be, that his connection to Hashem is not what it could be. This feeling is real and it is holy. It is the neshamah's own yearning. He should not suppress it, but he should not dwell in it either. Let the ache move him — to open a sefer, to daven with more concentration, to take on a mitzvah he has been putting off. The yearning is the ratzo. The learning, the davening, the mitzvah — that is the shov. And the shov is the purpose.
4. **Feeling pained about a difficult situation:** It is okay to feel bitter and even to cry. Pain is real and should not be denied. But it should not reach the point where it stops you from doing something to improve the situation. Feel the pain, then act. The crying should fuel the doing, not replace it.
5. **Wondering whether your pain is genuine or depression:** If you also feel pain for other people's suffering, and for the fact that we are still in galus, that is a good sign. It suggests that your pain over your own situation is genuine — rooted in sensitivity and caring — and not the self-inflicted pain of depression. Depression is self-focused. Genuine pain extends beyond the self.

6. Feeling like a bad person: If you find yourself thinking “I am bad,” “I am worthless,” or “I’ll never change” — fight those thoughts as hard as you can. They are simply not true. They are a trick of the yetzer hara, designed to paralyze you. Tell yourself: I have an indestructible, eternal neshamah that is always connected to Hashem — a chelek Eloka mima’al<sup>12</sup>, a piece of G-d Himself. Nothing I have done can ever change that. Even if I made a bad decision, that does not make me a bad person. A bad choice is something I did. It is not who I am. And thinking “I am bad” is itself a bad choice — one I can change right now by choosing to see the truth.

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## The Final Orientation

Bitterness has a place. It may intensify contrast. It may release grief. It may express longing. But it is not the destination. And it is not a mitzvah.

The destination is bitachon and simcha — and these are mitzvos. Bitachon means trusting in Hashem’s strength to help you pick yourself up — no matter how many times you have fallen, no matter how many times you have failed. It means trusting that Hashem believes in you, that He placed a Divine soul within you, and that He knows you can always rise again. Even if you feel weak, even if you don’t trust yourself, you trust in Hashem’s belief in you.

Simcha means aligning with the truth that Torah and mitzvos are the most precious realities that exist. Even when the emotion is not yet fully present, you orient yourself toward it because it is true. Deep down, your neshamah is happy to serve Hashem. The work is to bring that neshamah to the surface — to seek it out and connect it into your daily life.

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The avodah is not to break yourself. The avodah is to rise.

Bitterness and tears may arise naturally. When they do, they can be holy. But they are not chased and not made into a spiritual project. They are not a goal — only sometimes a natural outcome of sincere feeling.

Because the world Hashem is bringing into being is not a world of merirus. It is a world without exile, without death, without tears. It is a world of revealed Geulah. It is a world of simcha. And we prepare ourselves for that world now — through trust in Hashem’s strength to lift us, through His belief in us, and through serving Him with joy.

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*What follows are the three teachings of the Rebbe on this subject, each presented with context, the original Hebrew text with nikud, and a conversational English translation.*

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<sup>12</sup> איוב לא, ב. תנ"א פֶּרֶק ב'.

# Teaching 1: No Need to Fast Shovavim — Already Accomplished

Sefer HaSichos 5749, Vol. 1, p. 185, Footnote 64

## Context

In the *sicha* of Shabbos Parshas Shemos 5749 (1989), the Lubavitcher Rebbe explained why the *yahrtzeit* of the Rebbeim is celebrated with a *farbrengen* rather than with fasting, which had been the customary practice on a *yahrtzeit* until the era of Chassidus. The Rebbe's reasoning: fasting on a *yahrtzeit* was meant to accomplish a specific spiritual rectification. But that rectification was already completed by the earlier generations. Therefore, in our times, we connect with the holiness of the *yahrtzeit* through Torah study, giving *tzedakah*, and increasing in *mitzvos* — rather than through fasting.

The Rebbe then applies this same principle to *Shovavim* — the six weeks covering the first six *parshiyos* of Sefer Shemos, during which it was customary to fast several days each week to rectify the sin of *zera l'vatala*. The Arizal revealed that through fasting on specific days and giving *tzedakah*, a person could repair the spiritual blemish caused by this sin.

But the Alter Rebbe never mentions fasting during Shovavim anywhere — not in *Tanya*, not in *Torah Or*, not in *Likkutei Torah*. He doesn't even mention the word "Shovavim." The Rebbe explains that this is because the communal rectification was already accomplished from the era of the Arizal through the students of the Baal Shem Tov. From the generation of Chabad onward, the community no longer needs to fast during Shovavim.

Even the Maggid of Mezritch explicitly told his son, Reb Avraham "the Malach," not to fast the fasts of Shovavim.

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ועל פי זה אולי יש לומר הטעם שלא נזכר בספרי יסוד  
חסידות חב"ד הנזכרים לעיל (תניא, תורה אור ולקוטי  
תורה) על דבר תעניות שובבי"ם בשבועות אלו  
(מתחלת ספר שמות) ואפילו לא הענינו התיבה  
שובבי"ם! גם לא בהערות הצמח צדק שבלקוטי תורה!

אף שהובא בכתבי האריז"ל (שער רוח הקדש תיקון כו.  
סדור האריז"ל לאחרי תפלת ערבית) ובפוסקים —

כי עיקר התיקון על ידי תעניות אלו כבר נסתים  
בדורות הראשונים.

[ולהעיר ממואמרי אדמו"ר הזקן הקצרים עמוד תקמ"ט  
שמביא ענין שובבי"ם. וגם שם לא הוזכר ענין התעניות].

Based on this, perhaps we can suggest the reason why the fasting of *Shovavim* during these weeks is not mentioned at all in the foundational works of Chabad Chassidus — not even the concept, not even the *word* "Shovavim"! Not even in the glosses of the Tzemach Tzedek in *Likkutei Torah*!

— Even though it is brought in the writings of the Arizal and in the *poskim* —

**because the main rectification through these fasts was already completed in the earlier generations.**

Even where the Alter Rebbe discusses Shovavim — in *Maamarei Admor HaZaken HaKetzarim*, p. 549 — fasting is not mentioned at all.

וַיֵּינֹו סְתִירָה לְנִצְחִיּוֹת הַתּוֹרָה — כִּי הַשְּׁנוּי הוּא לֹא  
בְּהַתּוֹרָה חֵם וְשָׁלוֹם, כִּי אִם בְּמִצְבֵּי הָעוֹלָם וְהַגּוּף כּו'.  
וְלִהְיֵיר מִהַמְּבֹאֵר בְּרַמְבַּ"ם בְּנוֹגַע לְמִצְוֹת מַחֲיַת עַמְלֵק.  
וְיִתִּירָה מִזֶּה — שֶׁבְּטָלָה מְגִלַּת תְּעֵנִית (רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יח,  
ב).

וְרֵאָה בְּאֵרִיכּוֹת לְקוֹמֵי שִׂיחוֹת כֶּרֶךְ כ"ג עֲמוּד 34 וַאֲיִלָּךְ  
— שֶׁהַשְּׁנוּי הוּא רַק בְּגִשְׁמִיּוֹת הָעוֹלָם, אֲבָל בְּרוּחָנִיּוֹת  
עֲנִינִים אֵלֹו נִצְחִיִּים.

(\* ) לְהַעִיר מֵאַגְרַת הָרַב הַמְּגִיד לְבָנוּ מוֹד' פְּרִשֵׁת שְׁמוֹת  
תַּק"ב: בְּאַזְהָרָה שְׁלֹא יִתְעַנֶּה תְּעֵנִית שׁוֹבְבִי"ם.

This is not a contradiction to the eternity of the Torah — the change is not in the Torah, but in the condition of the world and the body.

Noteworthy: the Rambam on erasing Amalek — the command is eternal but the circumstance changed. And *Megillas Ta'anis* was nullified — not a change in halachah, but in situation.

See *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 23, p. 34: the change is only physical; in spirituality these matters are eternal.

(\* ) The Maggid wrote to his son (Parshas Shemos, 1772): warning him *not* to fast the fasts of Shovavim.

## The Principle Established

The corrective practices of earlier generations accomplished their purpose. The Torah's directives are eternal, but the circumstances that called for communal fasting have been fulfilled. This is the foundation for everything that follows.

# Teaching 2: Teshuvah Through Joy, Not Bitterness

Maamar: Margela B'pumei D'Rava — Vayishlach, 5746 (1985) — Section 2

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## How This Builds on Teaching 1

Teaching 1 established that *communal* corrective fasting is no longer needed because earlier generations completed the rectification. But that teaching was about communal practice — the community's obligation to fast during Shovavim.

Here the Rebbe goes further: the same principle applies to the **individual's personal teshuvah**. Not just communal fasting — but the entire model of bitterness, brokenheartedness, and tears as the bridge between basic teshuvah and higher teshuvah has been replaced. After the Holocaust and the immense suffering of the twentieth century, the Jewish people have been refined to such a degree that every Jew alive today connects directly to the higher teshuvah — through trust and joy.

## Context

In this maamar, the Rebbe explores a discourse originally delivered by the Frierdiker Rebbe during the *sheva brachos* following the Rebbe's wedding on 14 Kislev, 1928. The maamar is titled "Margela B'pumei D'Rava" ("It was a common saying in the mouth of Rava"), after the opening of a passage in the Gemara (Brachos 17a):

*"The ultimate purpose of wisdom is teshuvah and good deeds."*

The Frierdiker Rebbe discusses the traditional model: teshuvah through bitterness and tears. Simple Jews who say Tehillim with a broken heart and cry their hearts out. That's the classic approach described in the Alter Rebbe's *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*, and it's how Jews have done teshuvah for generations.

But the Rebbe steps in with a revolutionary statement: **in our generation, that model no longer applies.**

## The Rebbe's Argument

After everything the Jewish people have endured — we don't have the strength for bitterness. What we need is encouragement. So in our generation, teshuvah has to come from joy. Not bitterness — joy.

**First: Trust in Hashem.** "Tracht gut vet zain gut" — think good and it will be good. The positive thought itself generates the good outcome. It's not wishful thinking; it's an act of faith so powerful it reshapes reality. The Tzemach Tzedek told a chossid exactly this, and it worked.

**Second: Serving Hashem with joy beyond what you naturally feel.** Not the easy kind of joy that comes when everything makes sense. The Rebbe is talking about choosing joy when you don't feel it — working at it. The Rambam calls this an "*avodah gedolah*," a great and demanding service.

Even the Alter Rebbe himself, in *Iggeres HaTeshuvah* (ch. 11) and *Tanya* (ch. 26), says that "my sin is before me always" doesn't mean walking around miserable. The very next verse says, "Let me hear joy and gladness!" The bitterness was always just a brief moment — never a permanent state. And the Alter Rebbe explicitly says that teshuvah from bitterness is only the lower kind; teshuvah from joy is the higher level.

We're in the sixth millennium — the cosmic “Friday” — getting close to “Shabbos.” Obviously our avodah should be the joyful kind. We're almost there; act like it.

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וְהִנֵּה בְּהַמְשֵׁךְ הָעֲנָן מֵבִיא שָׁמַיִם <sup>13</sup> ,	So, in the original maamar, the Friediker Rebbe goes on to make this point:
שְׁעֵנֵי הַתְּשׁוּבָה יִשְׁנוּ אֶצֶל כָּמָה אָנָשִׁים פְּשׁוּטִים שְׂאִינָם בְּעֵלֵי יְדִיעָה וְהַשְׁפָּלָה, וְהֵם מִתְעוֹרְרִים בְּיֹתֵר בַּתְּשׁוּבָה וְכו', וּבּוֹכִים בְּמַר נַפְשָׁם,	Teshuvah happens with simple people who aren't scholars — and they actually get more fired up than anyone, crying their hearts out.
כְּמוֹ שְׂאֵנוּ רוֹאִים בְּמוֹחָשׁ דְּאִמִּירַת תְּהִלִּים שְׁלֵהֶם הוּא בְּלֵב נִשְׁבֵּר.	We've all seen it — the way they say Tehillim with such a broken heart.
אֲמָנָם עֲנֵן הַמְרִירוֹת שֶׁבַּתְּשׁוּבָה אֵינוֹ שֵׁךְ בְּדוֹרֵנוּ זֶה הָאֲחֵרוֹן, דָּרָא דְעִקְבָּתָא דְמִשְׁיחָא,	But here the Rebbe steps in: that whole bitterness approach? It doesn't apply anymore — not for our generation, the last generation before Mashiach.
בֵּינָן שְׁבִדוֹרֵנוּ אֵין לָנוּ כֹחַ לְעֲנֵן הַמְרִירוֹת וְכו', וְצָרִיכִים הִתְחַזְּקוֹת וְהִתְעוֹדְדוֹת יִתְרָה כו',	After everything we've been through, we don't have the strength for bitterness. We need encouragement.
וְלָכֵן בְּדוֹרֵנוּ זֶה עֲבוֹרַת הַתְּשׁוּבָה הִיא מִתּוֹךְ שִׂמְחָה דְיוֹקָא.	So in our generation, teshuvah has to come from <b>joy</b> . Not bitterness — joy.
הֲרִי יְדוּעַ פִּתְגָם רְבוּתֵינוּ נִשְׂאִינֵנוּ (וּבְכֹר נִדְפָס <sup>14</sup> )	We all know the famous saying of the Rebbeim (already published):
"טראכט גוט וועט זיין גוט",	<b>"Tracht gut vet zain gut" — "Think good and it will be good!"</b>
הֵינּוּ שֶׁהַמַּחְשְׁבָה בְּאִפְסָן שֶׁל טוֹב עֲצֻמָּה הִיא הַמְּבִיאָה עֲמָה אֶת הַטּוֹב,	The positive thought itself actually makes the good happen.
וְאֵין צָרִיךְ לְהִיּוֹת כָּלֵל עֲנָן שֶׁל מְרִירוֹת, אִמִּירַת תְּהִלִּים וּבְכִיָּה בְּמַר נַפְשׁוֹ וּנְתִינֵת צְדָקָה וְכו',	You don't need the bitterness routine — the crying, the Tehillim through tears —
כִּי הַמַּחְשְׁבָה טוֹבָה עֲצֻמָּה תְּבִיא עֲמָה טוֹב (וועט זיין גוט).	because the trusting thought itself will bring good with it.
וּבְכַרְמֵי שְׂמוּבָא עַל זֶה <sup>15</sup> סְפוֹר הַצִּמְחָה צְדָק שְׂאֵמֵר לְאַחֵד הַחֲסִידִים טראכט גוט וועט זיין גוט, וְכֵן הָיָה,	The Tzemach Tzedek told a chossid "tracht gut vet zain gut," and that's exactly what happened!
הֲרִי זֶהוּ עֲנָן שֶׁל מַעֲשֵׂה רַב <sup>16</sup> .	A real-life precedent. Trust in Hashem actually works.

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<sup>13</sup>כט, א.

<sup>14</sup>אגרות קדש אדמו"ר מוהר"י צ חלק ב' עמוד תקלו. חלק ו' עמוד קצו.

<sup>15</sup>שם.

<sup>16</sup>שבת כא, א. וְשֵׁם נִסְמָן.

ומכל זה מוכן שצריך להיות העבודה מתוך שמחה.

דנוסף להמבאר באגרת התשובה<sup>17</sup> דמה שכתוב<sup>18</sup> "וחטאתי נגדי תמיד" אין המכון להיות תמיד עצב נבזה חס ושלום,

אלא "נגדי" דיקא הינו מרחוק,

דהא כתיב בתריה<sup>19</sup> "תשמיעני ישון ושמחה" כו',

שתכף אחרי רגע קטן דמרירות, "לב נשבר ונדכה"<sup>20</sup>, צריך להיות שלמות הששון והשמחה,

הנה עוד זאת, מכאן באגרת התשובה שם<sup>21</sup>, שהתשובה מתוך מרירות היא תשובה תפאה והתשובה מתוך שמחה היא תשובה עלאה,

והרי בדורנו זה, בעקבתא דמשיחא, אחרי כל הצרות והיסורים<sup>22</sup>, אשר יסורים ממרקין<sup>23</sup> מבררים ומזככים ומרוממים,

הרי כל ישראל הם כמצב הכי עליון, ושיכים לתשובה עלאה דיקא, שהיא מתוך שמחה.

ויש להוסיף: ענין תשובה תפאה מתוך מרירות הוא פעם אחת בשבוע כליל ששי<sup>24</sup>, והרי אנו עומדים באלף הששי קרוב לסופו<sup>25</sup>, קרוב ליום השבת,

אם בן פשיטא שהעבודה בזמן זה היא מתוך שמחה דתשובה עלאה.

**Bottom line: our avodah has to be with simchah.**

Even in Iggeres HaTeshuvah, "my sin is before me always" doesn't mean walking around miserable, G-d forbid.

"Before me" means at a distance — in the background, not front and center.

Because the very next verse says, "Let me hear joy and gladness!"

Right after that brief moment of bitterness, you need complete joy. It was always just a moment, never permanent.

The key: teshuvah from bitterness is only the *lower* kind. Teshuvah from joy — that's the *higher* level.

In our generation, after all the suffering — suffering that cleans, refines, purifies, and elevates —

**Every Jew alive today is at the highest level — connected directly to the higher teshuvah, from joy.**

The bitter teshuvah was for Friday night. We're in the sixth millennium — the cosmic "Friday" — right before "Shabbos."

So obviously our avodah now should be the joyful kind. We're almost at Shabbos; act like it!

<sup>17</sup> פרק י"א.

<sup>18</sup> תהלים נא, ה.

<sup>19</sup> שם, י.

<sup>20</sup> שם, יט.

<sup>21</sup> פרק י' ואלף.

<sup>22</sup> ראה שערי תשובה לאדמו"ר האמצעי חלק א' ה, ב.

<sup>23</sup> יומא פו, א. וראה אגרת התשובה פרק א' (צ, סוף עמוד ב').

<sup>24</sup> סוף פרק י'.

<sup>25</sup> ראה בכל זה גם ספר המאמרים תרס"ג עמוד רנו.

תשובה עלאה היא ענין אתדבקות רוחא ברוחא בבחינת  
נשיקין<sup>26</sup>, שהוא ענין עבודת התפלה, ובעקר למוד  
התורה,

The higher teshuvah: soul connecting with soul,  
like a kiss — through davening and especially  
learning Torah.

"פקודי ה' ישרים משמחי לב"<sup>27</sup>, שהתורה מביאה  
שמחה בפסק ההלכה<sup>28</sup>.

"The mitzvos of Hashem make the heart  
happy." Torah brings simchah — a halachic  
fact!

"תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלקיך בשמחה ובטוב  
לבב"<sup>29</sup>. הרמב"ם<sup>30</sup>: העבודה בשמחה, "מפוז ומכרפר  
בכל עז"<sup>31</sup>.

"Because you didn't serve Hashem with joy."  
The Rambam: serve with joy, like Dovid  
HaMelech "leaping and dancing with all his  
might!"

השמחה שישמח האדם בעשיית המצוה ובאהבת הא-ל  
שצוה בהן עבודה גדולה היא,

The Rambam: the joy of doing a mitzvah and  
loving Hashem is an *avodah gedolah* — a great  
and demanding service.

השמחה צריך להיות גם למעלה מהשגתו, אשר בשביל  
לגלות שמחה זו צריך עבודה דוקא<sup>32</sup>, עבודה גדולה  
דיקא.

The simchah must go beyond what you can  
grasp. To tap into it takes *serious* work.  
Choosing joy when you don't feel it.

מכל זה מובן: עבודת התשובה בזמן הזה — לא  
מרירות, אלא דוקא תשובה בשמחה.

**Teshuvah in our times is not about  
bitterness. It's about joy.**

## The Principle Extended

If Teaching 1 said the *community* doesn't need to fast, Teaching 2 says the *individual* doesn't need to be bitter. The path forward is trust and joy. Bitterness was an important tool to achieve proper Teshuva — but nowadays we can achieve complete Teshuva even without bringing ourselves to bitterness, but with joy alone.

<sup>26</sup> פירק א'.

<sup>27</sup> תהלים יט, ט.

<sup>28</sup> שלחן ערוך אורח חיים ראש סימן תקנ"ד. ושם נסמן.

<sup>29</sup> תבואה כח, מז.

<sup>30</sup> סוף הלכות לולב.

<sup>31</sup> ראיה שמואל ב, ו, טז.

<sup>32</sup> ראיה אגרת הקדוש סימן י"ב (קית, סוף עמוד ב' ואילך). ובכמה מקומות.

# Teaching 3: Crying Can Be Counterproductive — Just Act

*Likutei Sichos Vol. 10, Parshas Vayigash — Sichas 2, Sections 7–1*

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## How This Builds on Teachings 1 and 2

Teaching 1 said communal fasting is no longer needed. Teaching 2 said individual bitterness is no longer a prerequisite to complete Teshuva. Teaching 3 goes the furthest: crying and bitterness are not merely unnecessary — they *can* be counterproductive.

In the Shovavim teaching, fasting was described as “already accomplished.” In the maamar, bitterness was described as “replaced by joy.” Here, crying is described as something that *can* weaken your ability to act — because it risks giving you a false sense of having done something when you’ve done nothing. This is the sharpest formulation of the principle: not just “you don’t need to cry,” but “crying can, possibly, actually make things worse.”

## Context

After Yosef reveals his identity to his brothers, the Torah describes how he and Binyamin fall on each other’s neck and cry (Bereishis 45:14). Rashi explains from the Midrash that each brother was crying prophetically over the destruction of the Mikdash in the other brother’s portion of Eretz Yisroel.

Then when Yosef meets Yaakov after twenty-two years of separation, only Yosef cries. Yaakov doesn’t cry because he was saying Kerias Shema. The Zohar adds that Yosef’s tears were over the future Churban.

## The Rebbe’s Two Questions

**Question 1:** Why did each brother cry for the *other’s* Mikdash and not his own? A person is closest to himself!

**Question 2:** If the crying was about the Churban (as the Zohar says), how could Yaakov remain calm enough to say Shema with full kavana while witnessing a prophetic vision of the Temple’s destruction?

## The Answer: Crying vs. Doing

Crying, in its simplest sense, is what you do when there’s nothing left to do. You cry and it brings some relief. But it doesn’t fix anything.

**The principle:** As long as there is something you can do to improve the situation, you shouldn’t cry — you should act. Crying is only appropriate when you’ve genuinely exhausted every option.

For *someone else’s* spiritual destruction — you can help (rebuke gently, daven for them), but ultimately their teshuvah is in their hands. Once you’ve done everything you can and their Mikdash is still in ruins, you cry. That’s all that’s left.

But for *your own* spiritual destruction, there is *always* something more you can do. Teshuvah, Torah, tefillah, another mitzvah. So crying is never truly warranted.

## The Risk of Crying

And the Rebbe adds the sharpest point: *sometimes* crying can actually weaken your drive to act. You cry, you feel the emotional release, and you tell yourself: “I already cried about it — I’ve done my part.” The

crying can become a substitute for action. It can give you a false sense of accomplishment. The Rebbe is warning that this is a real risk, not that crying is always harmful, but that it carries this danger.

The only exception: tears of teshuvah — where the crying itself is the turning point and the rebuilding. As the pasuk says, “Place my tears in Your flask.” Those tears count.

**Otherwise: don't try to cry, don't want to cry, don't enjoy crying. Just do something positive.**

### Applied to Yosef, Binyamin, and Yaakov

Each brother cried for the *other's* Mikdash — because for the other's destruction, crying was the only thing left. But for his own Mikdash, each could still act.

Yaakov is the father of all the tribes. Both Temples are “in his portion.” So for Yaakov, there is always something he can do. Instead of crying, he said Kerias Shema — the ultimate act of self-surrender to Hashem, which the sicha explains is equivalent to bringing a korban. Yaakov wasn't avoiding the Churban. He was rebuilding the Mikdash in the deepest possible way.

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### ג. אָמַנְנָם, צָרִיף לְהַבִּין: Section 3. Now, we need to understand:

לָמָּה בָּכָה יוֹסֵף עַל הַמִּקְדָּשׁוֹת בְּחֶלְקוֹ שֶׁל בְּנֵימִין, וּבְנֵימִין  
בָּכָה עַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן בְּחֶלְקוֹ שֶׁל יוֹסֵף; לְכַאוּרָה אֲדַרְבָּא כָּל  
אֶחָד מֵהֶם עָלָיו לְבָבוֹת עַל חוּרְבַן בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ שֶׁבְּחֶלְקוֹ  
הוּא? הָרִי "אָדָם קָרוֹב אֶצְל עֲצָמוֹ"<sup>33</sup>!

Why did Yosef cry over the Mikdashos in Binyamin's territory, and Binyamin over Yosef's? It should be the opposite! “A person is closest to himself!”

(וְעַד כְּדֵי כֵךְ דְּאֶפִּילוּ בְּמִצְוֹת אֶהְבֵּת יִשְׂרָאֵל — הָאֵהָבָה  
אֵינָהּ אֶלָּא "כְּמוֹךְ", בְּכ"ף הַדְּמִיוֹן<sup>34</sup> — "תִּיבָה קוֹדְמִין"<sup>35</sup>)

(Even Ahavas Yisroel is only “like yourself.” When you have one jug of water, “your life comes first.”)

וְאִם כֵּן בּוֹדָאֵי שְׁלֵכָל אֶחָד נוֹגֵעַ יוֹתֵר הַמִּקְדָּשׁ שְׁלוֹ,  
וּבְמִילָא הֶבְכִי הִיא רְאִשִׁית כֹּל עַל חוּרְבָנּוֹ שֶׁל הַמִּקְדָּשׁ  
שְׁלוֹ.

So each brother should care *more* about his *own* Mikdash!

### עוֹד צָרִיף לְהַבִּין: Another question:

עַל הַפְּסוּק<sup>36</sup> "וַיִּבֶל עַל צְוֹאֲרָיו וַיִּבֶךְ עַל צְוֹאֲרָיו עוֹד",  
אֵינָהּ בּוֹהֵר<sup>37</sup> שְׂיוֹסֵף בָּכָה עַל בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ שֶׁנֶּחְרַב.

The Zohar: Yosef's crying when meeting Yaakov was over the future Churban.

מָדוּעַ רַק יוֹסֵף בָּכָה — וְלֹא יַעֲקֹב? Why did only Yosef cry — and not Yaakov?

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<sup>33</sup>סְנֵהֲדַרְיִין מ, ב. וְשֵׁם נִסְמָן. — וְלִהְעִיר אֲשֶׁר "הוּא יוֹתֵר קָרוֹב מִכְמוֹ הַקָּרוֹב אֶפִּילוּ רֵאשׁוֹן בְּרֵאשׁוֹן" (יְבֻכָה תַרל"ז פ"ב).  
<sup>34</sup>וְיְבֻכָה תַרל"ז שֵׁם. כְּבִהְעֵרָה 1.  
<sup>35</sup>נְדָרִים פ, ב. כְּבִיא מְצִיעָא סב, א.  
<sup>36</sup>פְּרִשְׁתַּנּוּ מו, כמ.  
<sup>37</sup>חֶלֶק א' ריא, סוף עמוד א'.

תירוצו של רש"י<sup>38</sup> שיעקב "היה קורא את שמע" — לפי הזהר, לכאורה, אינו תירוץ:

איך אפשרי שיעקב לא נתרגש על ידי חורבן בית המקדש, והיה יכול לקרות שמע בכונה?!

ד. וביאור הדבר: ענין הבכי' כפשוטו, הוא כדי להקל על הבוכה.

אין בכחה לתקן משהו, אלא שבכה — וירוח לו, ועל דרך מזה שכתוב היתה לי דמעותי לחם<sup>39</sup>. מזה מובן: כשיש בידו לתקן — אין מקום להרגיע רוחו בבכי' אלא צריך לעשות ולתקן.

ולכן כשרואה "חורבן מקדשו" של חבירו — משתתף בצערו ובוכה, אבל התיקון אינו תלוי בו אלא בחבירו שהוא בעל בחירה.

אולם בשעה שרואה את חורבן בית המקדש הפרטי שלו, אין לו להסתפק באנחה<sup>40</sup> ובבכי', כי אם להשתדל לתקן ולבנות מחדש<sup>41</sup>.

לבד באם הבכי' היא דמעות של תשובה, שאז הבכי' עצמה היא תיקון וכמו שנאמר שימה דמעותי בנאדך<sup>42</sup>.

ולפעמים הבכי' מחלישה עבודתו בבנין המקדש שלו באמרו בלבו כי כבר יצא ידי חובתו בבכי'.

ולכן בכית יוסף ובנימין היתה — כל אחד — על בית המקדש שבחלקו של השני; ועקב לא בכה כי היה קורא את שמע — כי יעקב הוא אביהם של כל בני ישראל, הן המשכן והן בית המקדש "בחלקו", ולכן עסק בתיקון —

"בית מוכן לקרבנות"<sup>43</sup> "וכל הקורא קריאת שמע הרי זה כאילו הקריב עולה וזבח"<sup>44</sup>,

Rashi's answer — Yaakov was saying Shema — according to the Zohar, doesn't seem like an answer:

How could Yaakov not be shaken by the Churban and still say Shema with kavana?!

**Section 4.** The nature of crying is to bring relief to the one who cries.

Crying doesn't *fix* anything. "My tears were my bread." When you *can* act — there's no place for crying. Get up and do something.

For someone else's Mikdash, you share the pain and cry. But the fixing depends on *him* — he has free will.

For your *own* Mikdash — don't settle for sighing and crying. Work to repair and rebuild. "One positive action is worth more than a thousand sighs."

The only exception: tears of *teshuvah* — the crying itself *is* the tikkun. "Place my tears in Your flask."

And *sometimes* crying can actually weaken your drive to rebuild — "I already cried, I've done my part." That's the risk.

That's why each brother cried for the *other's* Mikdash. Yaakov didn't cry because both Temples are "in his portion" — he threw himself into rebuilding —

The Beis HaMikdash is "a house for korbanos" — and "whoever says Shema is as if he brought an offering!"

<sup>38</sup>פרשתנו שם.

<sup>39</sup>תהלים מב, ד. וראה פירוש רש"י ואור התורה שם.

<sup>40</sup>ראה היום יום (עמוד לה): טובה פעלה אחת מאלף אנחות.

<sup>41</sup>ראה אגרת הקדש סימן ד'. לקומי שיחות ח"ב עמוד 692.

<sup>42</sup>תהלים נו, ט. אור התורה הנזכר לעיל.

<sup>43</sup>רמב"ם הלכות בית הכנסת בתחלתו.

<sup>44</sup>ברכות יד, ב. וראה לקומי תורה שלח (מ, סוף עמוד א' ואילך).

כי עיקר הקרבן: אדם כי יקריב — מכם קרבן לה<sup>45</sup>,  
קריאת שמע ומסירת נפש: בכל נפשך אפילו נוטל את  
נפשך<sup>46</sup>.

The essence of a korban: “*from yourselves* an offering.” Shema is total self-surrender. Yaakov wasn’t avoiding the Churban — he was rebuilding the Mikdash by giving his entire self to Hashem.

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As the Hayom Yom teaches: **“One positive action is worth more than a thousand sighs.”**

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<sup>45</sup>ויקרא (א, ב). לקוטי תורה ויקרא (ב, ב).

<sup>46</sup>ענין ב' מסירות נפש אלו ראה תורה אור וישב (ב, ב). לקוטי תורה ויקרא (ג, א), שיר השירים (א, א).