



LECH LECHA

EQUILIBRIUM IS OVERRATED

If You've Never Navigated Conflict, Who Says You Can?

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Lech Lecha

G-d speaks to Abram, commanding him, “Go from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father’s house, to the land that I will show you.” There, G-d says, he will be made into a great nation. Abram and his wife, Sarai, accompanied by his nephew Lot, journey to the land of Canaan, where Abram builds an altar and continues to spread the message of a single G-d.

A famine forces the first Jew to depart for Egypt, where beautiful Sarai is taken to Pharaoh’s palace; Abram escapes death because they present themselves as brother and sister. A plague prevents the Egyptian king from touching her and convinces him to return her to Abram and to compensate the brother-revealed-as-husband with gold, silver, and cattle.

Back in the land of Canaan, Lot separates from Abram and settles in the evil city of Sodom, where he falls captive when the mighty armies of Chedorla’omer and his three allies conquer the five cities of the Sodom Valley. Abram sets out with a small band to rescue his nephew, defeats the four kings, and is blessed by Melchizedek, the king of Salem (Jerusalem).

G-d seals the Covenant between the Parts with Abram, in which the exile and persecution (*Galut*) of the people of Israel is foretold, and the Holy Land is bequeathed to them as their eternal heritage.

Still childless ten years after their arrival in the Land, Sarai tells Abram to marry her maidservant Hagar.

Hagar conceives, becomes insolent toward her mistress, and then flees when Sarai treats her harshly; an angel convinces her to return and tells her that her son will father a populous nation. Ishmael is born in Abram’s eighty-sixth year.

Thirteen years later, G-d changes Abram’s name to Abraham (“father of multitudes”) and Sarai’s to Sarah (“princess”) and promises that a son will be born to them; from this child, whom they are to call Isaac (“will laugh”), will stem the great nation with which G-d will establish His special bond. Abraham is commanded to circumcise himself and his descendants as a “sign of the covenant between Me and you.” Abraham immediately complies, circumcising himself and all the males of his household.

TEXT 1A

Genesis 12:7

וַיֵּרָא ה' אֶל אַבְרָם, וַיֹּאמֶר: לְזַרְעֲךָ אֶתן אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת.

And G-d appeared to Abram and said, “I will give this land to your children.”

TEXT 1B

Genesis 12:7

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי: אֲנִי ה' אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים, לָתֶת לְךָ אֶת הָאָרֶץ
הַזֹּאת לְרִשְׁתָּהּ.

And G-d told him, "I am G-d who took you from Ur Kasdim
to grant you this land as an inheritance."

The first time the Jews entered Israel, they received it from G-d as a gift. The second time around, they received Israel as an inheritance.



TEXT 2

*Rabbi Yosef Rosen,
Tzafnat Paane'ach Al
HaTorah, Genesis 15:7*

דהנה, כבר אמר כי יתן לו בגדר מתנה . . . אבל כיבוש שני הוה גדר
ירושה.

G-d had previously promised to give Israel to Abraham as a gift. . . . However, the second [promise refers to the second] conquering [of Israel, which] was an inheritance.

TEXT 3

Rashi, Genesis 15:12

רָמַז לְצָרוֹת וְחֹשֶׁךְ שֶׁל גְּלוּיּוֹת.

This alludes to the troubles and darkness of the exiles.



The difference between a gift and an inheritance is that a gift can be temporary, but an inheritance is permanent.

TEXT 4

*Talmud, Bava Batra
129b*

”נָכְסִי לָךְ וְאַחֲרֶיךָ לְכָלֹנִי”, וְרֹאשׁוֹן רְאוּי לְיִוָּרְשׁוֹ - אֵין לְשֵׁנִי בְּמָקוֹם
רֹאשׁוֹן כָּלֹם.

נִשְׁאֵין זֶה לְשׁוֹן מִתְּנָה אֶלָּא לְשׁוֹן יְרוּשָׁה, וִירוּשָׁה אֵין לָהּ הֶפְסֵק.

[If one stipulates,] “My inheritance goes to you, and after your passing, it will transfer to another,” if the first recipient is a legitimate heir, the second party receives nothing.

This is not a gift; it is an inheritance, and an inheritance has no end.

TEXT 5

*Maimonides, Mishneh
Torah, Laws of
Terumah 1:5*

כָּל אֲשֶׁר־חִזְקוּ עוֹלֵי מִצְרַיִם וְנִתְקַדַּשׁ קִדְשָׁהּ רִאשׁוֹנָה, כִּינּוֹן אֲשֶׁר־לִי בְּטִלָּה קִדְשָׁתָן.
אֲשֶׁר־קִדְשָׁהּ רִאשׁוֹנָה, לְפִי אֲשֶׁר־יָתָהּ מִפְּנֵי הַכַּבּוּשׁ בַּלְבָּד, קִדְשָׁהּ לְשַׁעֲתָהּ וְלֹא קִדְשָׁהּ
לְעֶתִיד לָבוֹא.

כִּינּוֹן אֲשֶׁר־לִי בְּנֵי הַגּוֹלָה וְהִחְזִיקוּ בְּמִקְצַת הָאָרֶץ, קִדְשׁוּהָ קִדְשָׁהּ שְׁנִיָּה הָעוֹמֶדֶת
לְעוֹלָם, לְשַׁעֲתָהּ וְלְעֶתִיד לָבוֹא.

All the lands that Jews came to possess when they ascended to Israel from Egypt became sacred. This was Israel's first sanctification. When they were exiled from Israel, the sanctity of these lands expired. This is because these lands became holy via conquest. Therefore, the consecration was only effective for the duration of the conquest, not for all time.

By contrast, when the exiled Jews returned and took possession of portions of the land, they consecrated it anew. This consecration was forever, for that time and for all time.

TEXT 6

Siddur Tehillat Hashem,
Annotated Edition,
Amidah of the Festival
Liturgy, p. 343

כמפני חטאינו גלינו מארצנו.

Because of our sins, we were exiled from our land.

The first time the Jews entered Israel, the holiness of the land lasted only so long as the Jews remained in Israel. The second time they entered Israel, the land became holy in perpetuity.



TEXT 7A

*Rabbi Shneur
Zalman of Liadi,
Likutei Torah,
Devarim, p. 57b*

כנודע בגמרא, שרוב הגזירות והחומרות והסייגים
היו בזמן בית שני דוקא.

והיינו מחמת שבבית שני לא היתה גאולה שלימה,
כי היו מלכי עובדי כוכבים מושלים עליהם, כנודע .
. . ולכן גזרו בו חכמים כמה גזרות וסייגים, שלא
תהיה יניקת החיצונים.

מה שאין כן בבית ראשון . . . אין שם שליטה
וממשלה לסטרא אחרא כלל.

It is well-known from the Talmud that most of the
rabbinic decrees, stringencies, and precautionary
restrictions were imposed during the second-Temple
era.

This is because the Jewish people were not
completely free from the influence of their previous
exile during this era. They remained under the rule of
foreign kings, as is well-known. . . . The restrictive
rabbinic enactments were designed to guard against
these unholy influences.

This was not the case during the first-Temple era. . .
. At that time, the other side had no control or
governance over the Jews.

TEXT 7B

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman
of Liadi, Ibid.,
Bamidbar, p. 62a*

בבית ראשון לא היו מתפללין כלל . . . וכל מה
שיש תערוכות רע ביותר צריך להפריד על ידי אש
יותר גדול וחזק בתפילה לדבק בקונו. ולכן בבית
ראשון שלא היה הרע הרבה, לא היו צריכין
לתפילה בהתלהבות, כי אם כל מעשיהם היה להביא
הרע והדינים אל שרשם על ידי הקרבנות, היה
דיים.
אבל בבית שני התחילו לתקן התפילה, והיתה קצרה
לפי ערך הצטרפות האש ותערוכות הרע שהיה
בקרבים.
ואנחנו צריכים להתפלל יותר ויותר בהתלהבות
מאד. וכן בכל דור ודור למטה צריך להתפלל
בהתלהבות גדולה. ולא כי אפשר דרי - אדרבה,
מפני גודל הרע אשר נתערב ונתרבה בכל דור ודור,
צריך להפרידו על ידי אש חזק בתפילה, ולברר
הרע אשר בקרבנו.

During the first-Temple era, there was no daily prayer. . . . However, the more we decline spiritually, the more prayer we require because the searing passion of prayer removes our inner dross and attaches us to G-d. Therefore, during the first-Temple era, when there was scant spiritual decline, Jews did not require passionate prayer. The sacrificial rite sufficed to remove what little dross they had and to attach them to G-d. ■

During the second-Temple era, our sages began to introduce daily prayers. At that time, the prayers were relatively short—in proportion to the degree of flaming passion required to remove their increased dross.

In our day, we progressively increase our prayers and passion—in each generation, we pray with more passion. This is not because we are more pious than our predecessors. On the contrary, it is because each generation is increasingly infiltrated by spiritual dross. Thus, we require a more powerful flame of prayer to cleanse ourselves spiritually.



Penitents have passed tests the righteous have never faced. Moreover, after these tests, penitents are often more passionate, determined, and devout—they have a better relationship with G-d—than the righteous.

TEXT 8A

*Maimonides, Mishnah,
Avot, Introduction to
Chapter 6*

הַתְּסִיד הוּא שְׁנִמְשָׁךְ בְּפַעֲלָתוֹ אַחֵר מֵה שֶׁתַּעֲרֶהוּ פְּאֻתּוֹ וּתְכוּנָתוֹ,
וַיַּעֲשֶׂה הַטּוֹבוֹת, וְהוּא מִתְאַוֶּה וְנִכְסֵף אֵלֶיהֶן.

וּבַהֲסַכְמָה מִן הַפִּילוֹסוּפוֹת שֶׁהַתְּסִיד יוֹתֵר תָּשׁוּב וְיוֹתֵר שְׁלָם מִן
הַמוֹשֵׁל בְּנַפְשׁוֹ.

Pious people follow their passions and inclinations. They behave meritoriously because that is what they want and yearn to do.

The philosophers have agreed that the pious are more distinguished and complete than those who [struggle to] control themselves.

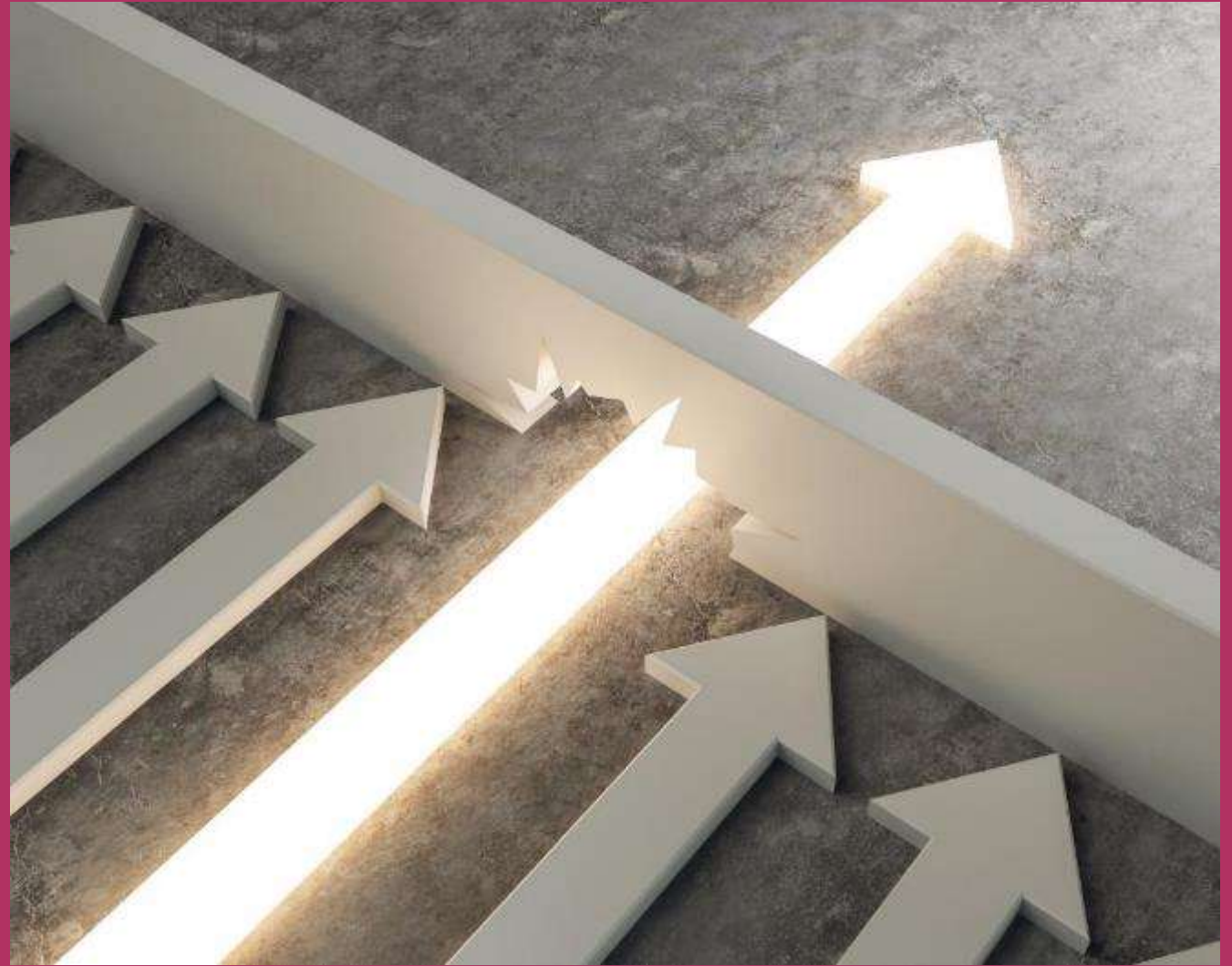
TEXT 8B

*Rabbi Shalom Dovber
Schneersohn, Sefer
Hamaamarim 5660–
5662, p. 169*

דצדיקים הם . . . תמיד בבחינת היחוד והדבקות באלוקות. והמה
מובדלים ומופרשים מכל בחינת הגשמה, ומכל שכן שרחוקים הם
מבחינת הרע כו'. שעבודתם תמיד בבחינת הגילוי אור האלוקי שמאיר
להם, שנרגש האור בנפשם ומתפעלים על אלקות.

Righteous people . . . are in a constant state of unity and attachment to G-dliness. They are detached from all forms of tactile pleasure and are certainly distant from evil and the like. In their worship, they are continually aware of the Divine's light. They feel it in their souls and are moved by His immanence.

The righteous
cruise through
life in the idyllic
lane. They
never struggle
because they
ignore all the
obstacles.



TEXT 8C

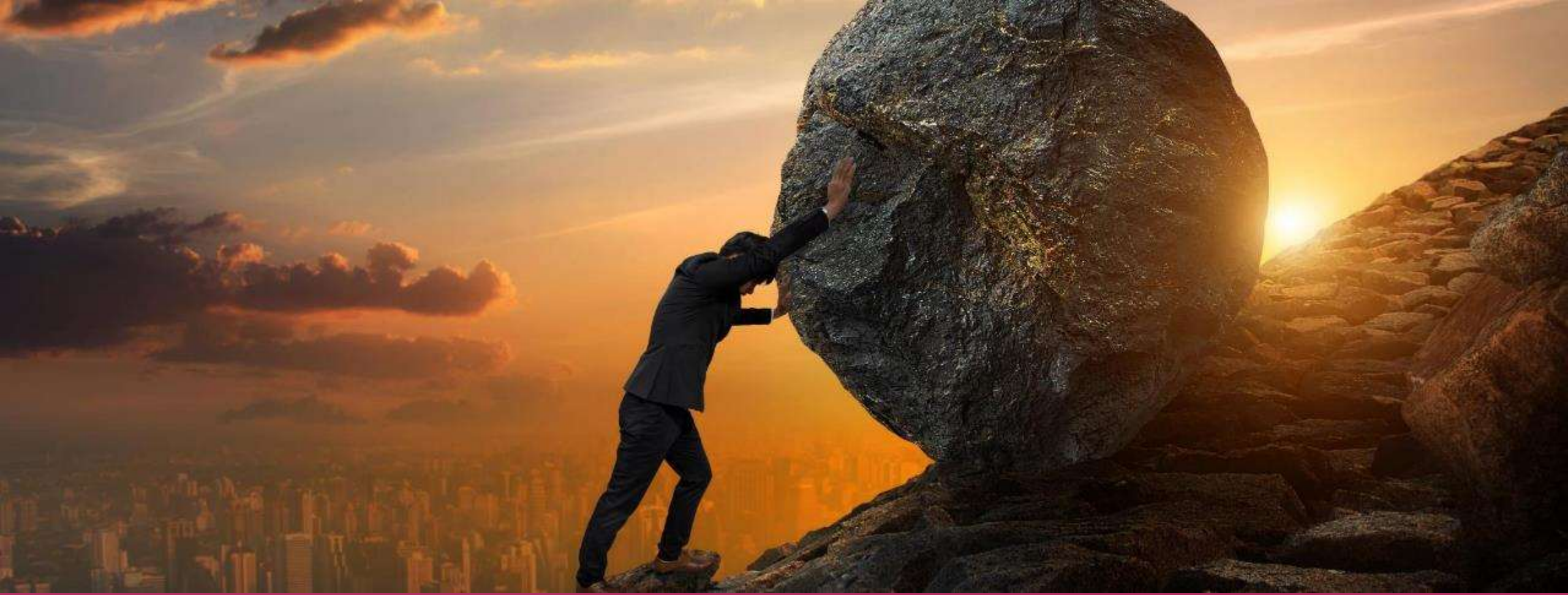
*Maimonides, Mishneh
Torah, Laws of
Teshuvah 7:4*

וְאֵל יִדְמָה אָדָם בַּעַל תְּשׁוּבָה שֶׁהוּא מְרַחֵק מִמַּעַלְת הַצַּדִּיקִים מִפְּנֵי הָעֲוֹנוֹת וְהַחֲטָאוֹת שֶׁעָשָׂה. אֵין הַדָּבָר כֵּן, אֲלֹא אֶהוּב וְנִחְמָד הוּא לִפְנֵי הַבּוֹרָא כְּאִלוֹ לֹא חָטָא מַעֲוָלָם.

וְלֹא עוֹד אֲלֹא שֶׁשָּׂכְרוּ הַרְבֵּה, שֶׁהָרִי טַעַם טַעַם הַחֲטָא וּפְרַשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ וְכַבֵּשׁ יִצְרוֹ. אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים: מָקוֹם שֶׁבַעֲלִי תְּשׁוּבָה עוֹמְדִין, אֵין צַדִּיקִים גְּמוּרִין יְכוּלִין לַעֲמֹד בּוֹ. כְּלוּמַר, מַעַלְתָּן גְּדוּלָּה מִמַּעַלְת אִלוֹ שֶׁלֹּא חָטְאוּ מַעֲוָלָם, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהֵן כּוֹבְשִׁים יִצְרָם יוֹתֵר מֵהֶם.

Penitents should not consider themselves lower than the righteous on account of their sins and transgressions. This is not true. They are beloved and desirable before the Creator as if they had never sinned.

Furthermore they will be greatly rewarded, for they have tasted sin and yet separated from it, conquering their urges. Our sages declared, “Where the penitent stands, even the completely righteous cannot stand.” The penitent transcends those who never sinned, for they overcome their evil inclination.



To wrestle with our weaknesses
and best them is to struggle for G-d.

TEXT 8D

*Maimonides, Mishnah,
Avot, Introduction to
Chapter 6*

וְכַאֲשֶׁר חֲקַרְנוּ דְּבַרֵּי חֲכָמִים בְּזֶה הָעִנְיָן, נִמְצָא לָהֶם שְׁהִמְתָּאוּהָ לַעֲבֹרוֹת וְנִכְסְף אֲלֵיהֶן -
הוּא יוֹתֵר תְּשׁוּבָה וְיוֹתֵר שָׁלֵם, מֵאֲשֶׁר לֹא יִתְאָוֶה אֲלֵיהֶן וְלֹא יִצְטָעַר בְּהִנָּחָתָן . . .
עַד שֶׁאָמְרוּ שֶׁשֹּׁכֵר הַמוֹשֵׁל בְּנִפְשׁוֹ גָּדוֹל לְפִי רֵב צָעָרוֹ בְּמִשְׁלוֹ בְּנִפְשׁוֹ. וְאָמְרוּ: "לְפוּם
צָעָרָא – אִגְרָא".

When we examined the words of our sages on this matter, we found that those who feel the allure of sin are more distinguished and complete than those who don't desire it...

(This is true) to the extent that they said that the reward of those who control their urges is commensurate with the degree of their struggle. And they said, "In accordance with the effort is the reward" (Mishnah, Avot 5:21).

TEXT 9

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 15, p. 107*

אויב די עבודה פון א אידן איז אין אן אופן וואס האט נישט צו טאן מיט וועלט, ער איז נישט געפרוואווט געווארן מיט א נסיון פון צד ההפכי, איז נישטא קיין זיכערקייט אז אויב ער וועט קומען לידי נסיון וועט ער עס קענען ביישטיין.

מה שאין כן א בעל תשובה, וואס עבודתו איז בדרך מלמטה למעלה, דער בירור וזיכוך התחתון אז ער ווערט א "כלי" צו קדושה, איז דער גילוי אלוקות אין דעם מטה אין אן אופן אז עס האט א קיום, עס ווערט נישט נפסק.

ועל דרך זה בכללות עבודתו לקונו: וויבאלד אז נאכדעם ווי ער האט שוין געהאט צוטאן מיט וועלט (און אפילו נאכן דורכפאלן, רחמנא ליצלן, אין ענינים וואס זיינען היפך הרצון העליון), קערט ער זיך דאך אום צום אויבערשטן ולתורתו ולמצותיו, איז דאס א באווייז אז דער ענין פון תורה ומצוות האט אים דורכגענומען און אויף אזויפיל, אז אויך דער דורכפאל קען עס נישט אוועקרייסן פון דעם אויבערשטן. דאס הייסט, זיין פארבונד מיטן אויבערשטן איז א שטענדיקער, האט נישט קיין הגבלות.

If your Jewish lifestyle is detached from worldly engagement, if you were never tested by the other side, there is no certainty that you would pass a test should you ever be tested.

Penitents are different. They start at the bottom and work their way to the top. Therefore, even their worst character traits become conducive to holiness. The manifestation of G-dliness in their lives is enduring. It is never interrupted. . . .

Penitents already tangled with the allure of worldliness. Moreover, they even stumbled, G-d forbid, and dabbled in behaviors that transgress G-d's will. Despite all this, they returned to G-d, His Torah, and His commandments. This demonstrates that the ethos of Torah and *mitzvot* permeate them to the extent that they cannot ever be separated again from G-d. Their bond with G-d is constant. It is without boundaries.



Our connection
with G-d is like a
muscle; the more
resistance it
encounters, the
stronger it grows.

TEXT 10A

*Rabbi Shalom Dovber
Schneersohn, Sefer
Hamaamarim 5660–
5662, p. 169*

הבעל תשובה שהיה תחילה בבחינת החושך והישות, שנפל . . .
ונתגשם ברע, ומשם חוזר ומבקש את ה' בכל לבבו . . . וחוזר בתשובה
שלימה . . . שנעשה בבחינת אין וביטול בתכלית, ועל ידי זה נתהפך
ונתברר בתכלית.

Penitents are completely subsumed within G-d. This is because they fell and became entangled in a state of ego, darkness, and evil. Yet they nullified their ego and returned from the dark to seek G-d with all their hearts . . . in complete penitence. . . . They achieve complete transformation.

TEXT 10B

*Jay Litvin, Vistas,
www.chabad.org/567556*

You stand in this moment. Many such moments lay behind you. Many more, G-d willing, before you. In each of these moments there is, there was, there will always be a choice. . . . At a certain point you have lived long enough to have made many choices and to be able to see the consequences they have wrought. From this vantage point, elevated by maturity, you now see that every choice you made was made in ignorance. You recognize that the full impact of each choice was not seen at the time, and had it been, then perhaps another choice would have been made. . . .

The remorse this awareness brings drives you . . . to seek forgiveness not for your sins, but . . . for the actions you were so sure at the time were right. Only now, when you have lived long enough to see their consequences, . . . did you see how very foolhardy you have been. . . . Each was flawed and limited and, in its wake, created consequences you could not foresee. Then, even though your mistakes and limitations could be excused by lack of knowledge, you would still desire to stand before the Heavenly Court and ask forgiveness. For these consequences, as unintentional as they may have been, are now very real and exist with a life of their own.

After you've lived enough years, you know that the future is as soon as yesterday and that ten or twenty years from now exists today. You know that just as you are asking forgiveness today for the consequences of actions taken ten or twenty years ago, so ten or twenty years from now you will be standing asking forgiveness for the actions you took today. . . .

And now, knowing this, you arrive at the decision that stands before you today: . . . You stand in fear and trepidation. You know that today's choice will create a future reality that you cannot possibly know. You are about to release an arrow from the bow and you are already responsible for whatever target it hits, whether you aimed at it or not. . . .

TEXT 10B

Continued

Yet, miraculously, you act. You release the arrow. You laugh. You sing and you dance. Because ultimately, through your years, you have learned that G-d loves you. You are joyous precisely because there is a Heavenly Court before which you can stand and receive forgiveness and understanding and love. You laugh precisely because you know that behind the imperative of doing the very best you can is the futility of doing anything more than you can. You breathe deeply and release a smile because you know that G-d wants no more from you than you are able to do and has already given you everything you need with which to do it. You dance because this is your freedom: to dance your part in G-d's creation with grace and courage and faith. And you sing knowing that you are only one voice in the chorus, and that the symphony is endless, ultimately perfect, yet paradoxically, dependent on you.

And finally, you realize that the failings and limitations, errors and miscalculations, even the consequences that cause the blood to rush to your face in shame, are also a part of your limited perspective, your narrow vision, your lowly vista. For if you could climb high enough you would see that the reason the Heavenly Court grants its forgiveness is that ultimately there is nothing to forgive.

From the highest plateau you would see that you are dancing your part perfectly. You always have. And you always will.

TEXT 11A

*Rabbi Yosef Rosen,
Tzafnat Paane'ach
Hashlamah, p. 13a*

דהוא כמו עצם המוריש, ולכך קיימא לן דגבי יורש ליכא שינוי רשות.

The heir becomes the testator, as it were. It is, therefore, the position of Jewish law that inheritance does not constitute a transference of ownership.

TEXT 11B

*Rabbi Yisrael Moshe
Chazan, Nachalah
LeYisrael, pp. 15a–b*

דלשון "מתנה" יפול בנכסים שהעוברו מרשות לרשות שלא מן הדין הגמור. או כמו שתאמר שאין למקבל זכות בגוף הנכסים כל עיקר, ולא זכה בהם כי אם מתורת חסד שבלב הנותנם לו . . . וזהו לשון "מתנה" בכל המקומות, שרצה לומר שאין לו זכות בהם אלא מכח הנתינה, וקודם אותה נתינה לא היה יכול לטעון על בעל הנכסים שום טענה ומענה עליהם. והוא ברור כשמש.

באנו ללשון "נחלה וירושה" . . . שהושמו בהעברת הממון במיתת האדם לרשות אחר, יהיה לזרעו אחריו, ותסוב הנחלה מלמעלה למטה . . . מפאת זכות עצמי שיש להם בגוף הנכסים למי שיהיה ראוי לזכות בהם. שמעיקרא היה להם שיעבוד מה בהם, ועכשיו הושפכו לאותו נחל שהיה מעיקרא.

ואפשר שלזה נקראת "נחלה", על דרך: כל הנחלים הולכים אל הים.

A gift is defined as a transfer of property that is not compelled by law. Another way to put it: The recipient has no inherent right to the property. The property is acquired solely by the largesse of the bestower. . . . This is the universal meaning of the term "gift." The recipient's right flows from the gift. Prior to the gift, the recipient had no right or claim to the property. This is clear as day.

Now we come to estate and inheritance. . . . This term relates to the transfer of one's property to another upon one's passing. As it transfers to the heir, the estate flows from above to below. . . . Before the passing, the heir has a vague encumbrance on the property. After the passing, the heir has an inherent right to the property. [In other words,] the property flows downstream.

This is, perhaps, why the Torah uses the word *nachalah*, a cognate of *nachal*—stream, to describe an estate. Estates are like rivers whose flow into the ocean cannot be blocked.

KEY POINTS

1. Righteous people are fortunate because all their urges are holy and they can, therefore, do precisely as they want. Penitents must always struggle against their urges.
2. Penitents are fortunate because they get to struggle for G-d every day. They are constantly working to serve G-d.
3. The righteous have never been tested. Thus, we can't know if they would prevail if tested. The penitent has been tested and prevailed. Thus, their bond is firmer or more enduring.
4. The penitent is exclusively devoted to G-d in every aspect of life. No part of their lives is separated from G-d. Thus, they enjoy oneness with G-d.
5. The same is true about relationships. Calm, peaceful relationships are relaxing and enjoyable. Tumultuous, tempestuous relationships can strengthen the couple's bond.

