



**EKEV**

**G-D ISN'T AN ACCOUNTANT**

*Why One Mitzvah Is Better than a Thousand Sins*

# PARSHAH OVERVIEW

## *Ekev*

In the parshah of *Ekev* (“Because”), Moses continues his closing address to the Children of Israel, promising them that if they will fulfill the commandments (*mitzvot*) of the Torah, they will prosper in the Land they are about to conquer and settle, in keeping with G-d’s promise to their forefathers.

Moses also rebukes them for their failings in their first generation as a people, recalling their worship of the Golden Calf; the rebellion of Korah; the sin of the spies; and their angering of G-d at Taberah, Massah, and Kibroth Hattaavah (“The Graves of Lust”). “You have been rebellious against G-d,” he says to them, “since the day I knew you.” But he also speaks of G-d’s

forgiveness of their sins, and of the Second Tablets that G-d inscribed and gave to them following their repentance.

Their forty years in the desert, says Moses to the people, during which G-d sustained them with daily manna from Heaven, was to teach them “that man does not live on bread alone, but by the utterance of G-d’s mouth does man live.”

Moses describes the Land they are about to enter as “flowing with milk and honey,” blessed with the “seven kinds” (wheat, barley, grapevines, figs, pomegranates, olive oil, and dates), and as the place that is the focus of G-d’s providence of His world. He commands them

to destroy the idols of the Land’s former masters, and to beware lest they become haughty and begin to believe that “my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.”

A key passage in our *parshah* is the second chapter of the Shema. This passage repeats the fundamental *mitzvot* enumerated in the Shema’s first chapter and describes the rewards of fulfilling G-d’s commandments and the adverse results (famine and exile) of their neglect. It is also the source of the precept of prayer and includes a reference to the Resurrection of the Dead in the messianic age.

What is the point of doing a random mitzvah here and there if before and after, one isn't doing *mitzvot*—or, worse, leading a lifestyle that is in violation of the Torah?



# TEXT 1

*Deuteronomy 10:17*

כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הוּא אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וְאֵלֵי הָאֱלֹהִים,  
הָאֵל-ל הַגָּדֹל הַגִּבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִשָּׂא פָנִים  
וְלֹא יִקַּח שֹׁחַד.

For the L-rd your G-d is the G-d of gods and  
the L-rd of lords—the great, mighty, and  
awesome G-d Who will show no favor; nor will  
He take a bribe.

## TEXT 2

*Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi,  
Ad Loc.*

לא ידעתי מה ממון נופל אצל הקדוש  
ברוך הוא.

I don't understand how a monetary  
bribe would be relevant to the Holy  
One, blessed be He.

# TEXT 3

*Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno,  
Deuteronomy 10:17*

”ולא יקח שוחד“. לא יסיר כלל מעונש העבירה  
בשביל זכות מצוה שעשה החוטא, כאמרם זכרונם  
לברכה שאין מצוה מכבה עבירה.

He does not offset the punishment for a sin because of a mitzvah that the sinner did, as our sages said, “A good deed performed does not extinguish the sin committed” (Talmud, Sotah 21a).

# TEXT 4

*Maimonides, Peirush  
Hamishnayot, Avot 4:22*

ואין ענינו שלא יקח שחד להטות הדין, כי זה מן השטות שירוחק מן ה' יתברך מה שלא יצוייר  
ואף לא ידומה, כי איך יצוייר לו שחד, ומה יהי השחד?

אבל ענינו מה שבארנו שהוא לא יקח שחד הטובות, כמו שיעשה אדם אלף טובות ורעה אחת,  
שלא ימחול ה' יתברך מעבירה ההיא לרוב טובותיו ויחסר לו מאלף טובותיו טובה אחת או  
יותר, אבל יענש על זאת הרעה האחת ויגמלהו על הטובות ההם כולם, וזהו ענין "לא יקח  
שחד".

It is preposterous to say that "G-d doesn't accept bribes"—how would one bribe Him? What would one bribe Him with?

Rather, it means that G-d does not accept bribes of *mitzvot*. For instance, if a person does a thousand *mitzvot* and one sin, G-d does not forgive the sin and deduct one *mitzvah* (or more). Rather, He punishes the person for their sin and separately rewards them for their *mitzvot*. This is the meaning of "He does not take a bribe."

# TEXT 5

*Rabbi Yisrael Hopstein,  
Avodat Yisrael, Shoftim*

ואמר הכתוב "לא תקח שחד", דהיינו שדרך היצר הרע לפתות בני אדם ולהפילם ברשת החטא ועון, ואחר כך הוא מתנחם ועושה מצוה או לומד תורה ואומר בלבו שנתכפר לו העבירה, עד שימלאנו לבו לשוב לעשות הרע. ולכן הזהירה תורה מדרך הזה, כי הוא כעין שוחד המעורר עיני חכמים, כי לא כן הדבר, שכר מצוה לחוד ועונש העבירה לחוד.

The verse tells us not to accept bribes. A person can sometimes convince themselves after they have sinned that when they do a mitzvah or study Torah, that good deed atones for their sin. Subsequently, this rationale will lead them to sin again and restart the process. Therefore, the Torah warns us against this way of thinking, for it is akin to bribery, which "blinds the eyes of the wise" (Deuteronomy 16:19). It is not the case that a good deed atones for a sin—rather, the punishment for sins and reward for good deeds are calculated independently.





G-d can't be bribed—  
a mitzvah does not  
cancel out a sin.

## QUESTIONS

1. Why don't good deeds counteract sins?
2. Is there a way to fix a sin, or does it remain as an eternal stain?

## TEXT 6

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei  
Sichot 24, p. 77*

ויש לומר מהטעמים אויף דעם: דער גדר פון מצות און עבירות באשטייט ניט (בלויז) אין זייער ווירקונג און אויפטו בנוגע דעם אדם המקיים — נאר דער גדר המצוה איז — קיום רצון העליון, און דער גדר פון אן עבירה איז — עובר אויף רצון העליון; ובמילא איז יעדער מצוה אן ענין לעצמו (וכן בהפכה).

The distinction between *mitzvot* and sins is not (just) in the effect they have on the person, but they are essentially two different things. A mitzvah is the fulfillment of G-d's will. A sin is a transgression of G-d's will. Consequently, every mitzvah is in its own category (and vice versa).

## ANSWER

1. A mitzvah, at its core, is about carrying out G-d's will; a sin is a defiance of G-d's will.

Thus, even if one performs many more *mitzvot*, the breach remains.

# TEXT 7

*Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno,  
Deuteronomy 10:17*

וכל זה יורה שלא תבטחו אם תחטאו להנצל  
בשום זכות מן העונש כלל, זולתי בתשובה  
השלמה.

No merit can save one from punishment for sins. The only way the slate can be wiped clean is through genuine repentance.

# TEXT 8

*Midrash, Yalkut  
Shimoni, Psalms 570*

אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל: בני, עד  
ששערי תשובה פתוחים עשו תשובה, שאני  
נוטל שחד בעולם הזה.

The Holy One, blessed be He, says to the Jewish nation, “My children, as long as the gates of repentance are open—repent! For I accept bribes in this world.”

## ANSWER

2. Genuine repentance, feeling remorse over the sin itself and resolving to not do it again, wipes one's slate clean.

That is the kind of bribe G-d accepts.

# TEXT 9

Rabbi Shmuel de Uceda,  
Midrash Shmuel, Avot  
4:22

כי ענין התשובה לחוד וענין שאר המצות לחוד. כי ענין התשובה שמכפרת, הטעם הוא כי בהיות האדם מתחרט מן העון, הרי זה בזאת התשובה מכבס את נגע נתק העון.

אבל מי שיש לו אלף אלפי רבבות של מצות ומיעוט עונות מונחות בקרן זוית ולא התודה עליהם, בודאי שאותם העבירות יעמדו במקומם, ואיך יוסרו מבלתי מסיר?

*Teshuvah* is one thing, and *mitzvot* are another thing. *Teshuvah* operates on the principle of atonement: when a person regrets their sin and repents, their repentance cleanses the spiritual stain of the sin.

But someone who has even hundreds of thousands of *mitzvot*, and just a few sins abandoned in a corner—but they never repented for those sins—the sins will stay there forever. How could they be removed if no one removes them?



# TEXT 10

*Rabbi Yosef Yaavetz,  
MISHNAH, Avot 4:22*

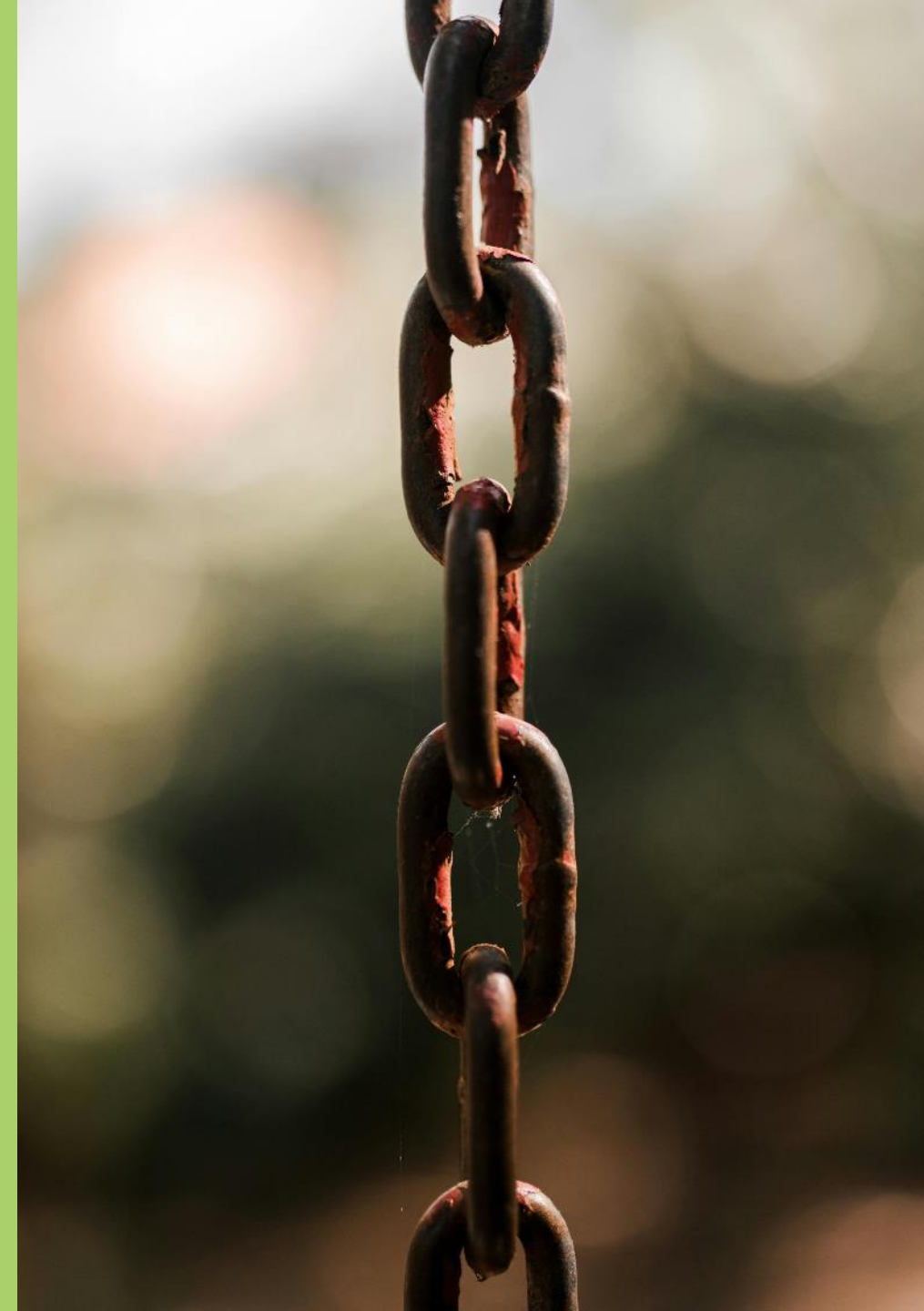
השוחד אינו אסור אלא קודם הפסק דין, שמא יטה הדין, אבל אם הדיין דן דין אמת  
לאמתו בלי שום עוול, והזכאי שלח לו דורון, מותר לקבלו.

וכן בענין המצוות, לא יקח ה' יתברך מצוה כדי לעשות עבירה בשום צד, אבל אם  
עשה עבירה והוא מתחרט ממנה ועושה מצוה תחתיה למען תתכפר לו העבירה,  
מועיל ומועיל.

It is only forbidden to give a bribe before a decision is made because the bribe will cause the judge to pervert justice. However, if the judge deliberates honestly and fairly, and only after the ruling is delivered the exonerated party sends him a gift, it is permitted to accept it.

Likewise, the Holy One, blessed be He, does not accept a mitzvah as a bribe so that one can later sin on the credit of that mitzvah. But if one has already sinned and regrets their sin, and does a mitzvah as a form of atonement for their sin—that is acceptable.

Repentance stems from regret about a specific sin, but it is focused on the deeper process of repairing one's relationship with G-d.



# TEXT 11

*Rabbi Shalom Dovber  
Schneersohn, Yom Tov  
Shel Rosh Hashanah  
5666, p. 37*

ענין התשובה, שמתעורר עצם הנפש וניזוז ממקומו, הן מצד המיצר דחטאים ועוונות רחמנא לצלן . . . הרי הוא משים אל לבו (חאפט ער זעך יעמאלט) עוצם ריחוקו איך שנתרחק מאלקות, ונוגע לו הענין בעומק נפשו . . . ומתמרמר בנפשו מאד, עד שכל עצמותו ניזוז ממקומו במרירות עצומה מאד . . . כאשר נוגע הענין אל פנימיות ועומק לבבו, הרי עצם נפשו בבחינת תנועה והזזה במרירות עצומה (מיט א שטארקע ניט גוטקייט ביותר). וממילא יש בזה המשכה (א ציא) והרצוא לאלקות גם כן בבחינת הזזת כל עצמותו עד כלותה ממש כו'.

The concept of *teshuvah* is that one is moved to the core of their soul because of their sins. . . . When they realize how distant they are from G-d, and it affects them to the depths of their soul, . . . they are moved to the core out of a sense of deep bitterness. . . . When it affects them to the depths of their heart, the essence of their soul is moved out of a sense of deep bitterness. As a result, they feel a great and all-consuming yearning to G-dliness from the very depths of their soul.

# TEXT 12

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman of  
Liadi, Tanya, Likutei  
Amarim, ch. 7*

תשובה גדולה כל כך שזדונות נעשו לו  
כזכיות ממש, שהיא תשובה מאהבה  
מעומקא דלבא באהבה רבה וחשיקה  
ונפש שוקקה לדבקה בו יתברך, וצמאה  
נפשו לה' כארץ עיפה וציה.

להיות כי עד הנה היתה נפשו בארץ ציה  
וצלמות, היא הסטרא אחרא, ורחוקה  
מאור פני ה' בתכלית, ולזאת צמאה נפשו  
ביתר עז מצמאון נפשות הצדיקים,  
כמאמרם זכרונם לברכה: "במקום  
שבעלי תשובה עומדים כו". ועל תשובה  
מאהבה רבה זו אמרו ש"זדונות נעשו לו  
כזכיות", הואיל ועל ידי זה בא לאהבה  
רבה זו.

A sinner must repent to such an extent that their sins transform into merits, which is achieved through "repentance out of love." This means repentance from the depths of the heart, with great love and passionate desire to cleave to G-d.

Because the sinner had been in a spiritually barren wilderness, in the shadow of the forces of evil, and infinitely removed from the light of the Divine Countenance, their soul now thirsts for G-d even more than the souls of the righteous. This is referenced by the statement of our sages, "In the place where penitents stand, not even the perfectly righteous can stand" (Talmud, Berachot 34b).

It is concerning the repentance out of such great love that the sages said (Talmud, Yoma 86b), "The penitent's sins transform into merits," since the remorse for these sins ultimately brought the sinner to this feeling of great love.



In an equally balanced world, one mitzvah makes all the difference.

# TEXT 13

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Torat  
Menachem 5728:1 (51), p.  
237*

יש כאלו שערערו ולעגו על הנהגת רבותינו נשיאנו הנזכרת לעיל, באמרם, מה כבר יתוסף על ידי זה שיהודי יניח תפילין פעם אחת?! . . .

ובכן, טענה זו היא היפך פסק דין הרמב"ם: "צריך כל אדם שיראה עצמו . . . וכן כל העולם חציו זכאי וחציו חייב . . . עשה מצוה אחת, הרי הכריע את עצמו ואת כל העולם כולו לכף זכות!"

There are those who mock the practice of encouraging Jews to perform a mitzvah, saying, "What is the point of putting on *tefilin* just one time?"

This claim is at odds with the ruling of Maimonides (Laws of Repentance 3:4): "A person should always look at themselves as equally balanced between merit and sin and the world as equally balanced between merit and sin. If one performs one sin, they tip their balance and that of the entire world to the side of guilt and bring destruction upon themselves. On the other hand, if one performs one mitzvah, they tip their balance and that of the entire world to the side of merit and bring deliverance and salvation to themselves and others."

# TEXT 14

*Mishnah, Avot 4:2*

מצוה גוררת מצוה.

A mitzvah leads to another mitzvah.

# TEXT 15

*Rabbi Elisha  
Greenbaum, "What's the  
Point of a One-Time  
Mitzvah?"  
[www.chabad.org](http://www.chabad.org)*

This question was once posed to the Lubavitcher Rebbe by a not-yet-religious individual. The Rebbe had compared adding extra *mitzvot* into one's daily routine to wearing a tie, which adds beauty and splendor to one's whole ensemble. In response, the man asked what seems to be an ingenious question. He pointed out that the Rebbe's analogy would hold true only for someone already wearing clothing; however, were a naked person to don a tie, rather than looking better, he'd look completely ridiculous.

The obvious import of the query is to question the value of any one mitzvah when performed by an otherwise unobservant person. When someone does nothing else Jewish and has no intention to change, what is the point of adorning oneself with a frilly appendage? It seems not only hypocritical, but foolish too.

The Rebbe agreed that a naked man wearing a tie might indeed look silly, but contended [that] the very act of putting [on] a tie would probably wake him up to the fact that he's naked in the first place. Sometimes the incongruity of being simultaneously underdressed but over-accessorized can lead you to rush off to cover yourself up.

The Rebbe's analogy speaks for itself. Do a mitzvah, and you'll find yourself realizing how much you want to do another one.



# TEXT 15

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Stepping onto the path of *mitzvot* may seem daunting, especially when surrounded by negativity. But like the famous saying about a journey of a thousand miles, a spiritual journey begins with a single mitzvah. Take that first step and see where it leads you. That one act, that one moment of connection, holds the potential to create a ripple effect not just in your life but in the entire world. Embrace the power of a single mitzvah. It may be the spark that ignites a fire within you.

Especially in a mitzvah-less lifestyle, one mitzvah can be the kindling spark to a chain reaction of good deeds.



## KEY POINTS

1. *Mitzvot* do not cancel out sins.
2. *Teshuvah* can cancel out sins, and even turn them into merits.
3. *Teshuvah* is about repairing our relationship with G-d.
4. Sins do not cancel out *mitzvot*.
5. One must always view themselves and the world as equally balanced. Any mitzvah could be the one to bring salvation to the world.
6. A mitzvah leads to another mitzvah—especially if it is a first mitzvah in an otherwise mitzvah-less lifestyle.

