The mission of **Torah Is Geshmack** is to bring out the richness and enjoyment of Torah for everyone, and in doing so bring them closer to Hashem.

**תשפ״ז**

# The Door Is Still Open

**Dovid Kopel**

For almost twenty years, I have had a disagreement with my משגיח (*spiritual mentor*) over a רמב״ם in הלכות תשובה ב:א. Yesterday I might have resolved this long standing מחלוקת (*dispute*).

The רמב״ם has already introduced the מצוה (*commandment*) of תשובה (*repentance*) and וידוי (*confession*). He then asks a very specific question: what is תשובה גמורה (*complete repentance*)? Clearly, this means something beyond the basic act of doing תשובה itself.

> אי זו היא תשובה גמורה. זה שבא לידו דבר שעבר בו ואפשר בידו לעשותו ופרש ולא עשה מפני התשובה. לא מיראה ולא מכשלון כח. כיצד. הרי שבא על אשה בעברה ולאחר זמן נתיחד עמה והוא עומד באהבתו בה ובכח גופו ובמדינה שעבר בה ופרש ולא עבר זהו בעל תשובה גמורה. (רמב״ם הלכות תשובה ב:א)

*What is complete repentance? It is when a person again encounters the very thing through which he sinned, has the ability to repeat it, but separates himself and does not do it because of his repentance — not out of fear and not because his strength has failed. How so? A person sinned with a woman. After some time, he was secluded with her again, while his love for her remained, his physical strength remained, and he was in the same place where he had sinned. If he separated himself and did not sin, he is a complete* בעל תשובה *(returnee).*

The words that always troubled my משגיח were:

> והוא עומד באהבתו בה

*His love for her remains.*

"Dovid'l," he would say to me, "you are telling me that the רמב״ם considers someone who still has such a תאוה (*desire*) to have reached this elevated level?"

He understood that true תשובה should purge the desire itself. He therefore suggested that the woman may have been the man's sister, so that the remaining אהבה (*love*) was an appropriate familial love rather than a continuing desire to sin.

That explanation never fully resonated with me. The רמב״ם seems to be emphasizing that the situation has not changed. He remains physically capable. He remains in the same place. Most strikingly, his desire for her remains. What has changed is not the temptation. What has changed is the man.

Yesterday, I suggested something further. The רמב״ם says:

> ולאחר זמן נתיחד עמה

*Later, he found himself secluded with her.*

Perhaps this man did not turn away at the first distant thought of sin. He saw her. He allowed himself to enter that room. The door closed behind him. His desire was still present, and everything was in place for him to repeat what he had done before.

And then he stopped.

At that moment, there was a הרהור של תשובה (*an awakening of repentance*). He separated himself and did not commit the act. Not because he was afraid. Not because he was too old or too weak. Not because the temptation had disappeared. The רמב״ם tells us precisely why:

> מפני התשובה

*Because of the* תשובה.

He had already gone too far. He may have made every wrong choice leading up to that moment. Nevertheless, he stopped because the person he had become through תשובה was no longer the person who had committed that original עבירה (*sin*).

This fits beautifully with the רמב״ם's words later in the same פרק (*chapter*). Among the ways of the בעל תשובה, the רמב״ם includes changing his name, as if to declare:

> אני אחר ואיני אותו האיש שעשה אותן המעשים

*I am someone else. I am not the same person who committed those deeds.*

תשובה גמורה does not necessarily mean that the struggle has disappeared. It means that even while the desire remains, another voice can now prevail. The same person stands in the same place, with the same strength and the same temptation — but in the deepest sense, he is no longer the same person.

We are human. We falter. Sometimes we even take the next step and allow the door to close behind us. But the רמב״ם may be teaching us that even then, the door back to Hashem remains open.

We can still stop. We can still separate ourselves. We can still become someone new.

May we all merit to become that new person, and through that זכות (*merit*), may we be granted a beautiful year filled with עליה (*ascent*).

*The Door Is Still Open*

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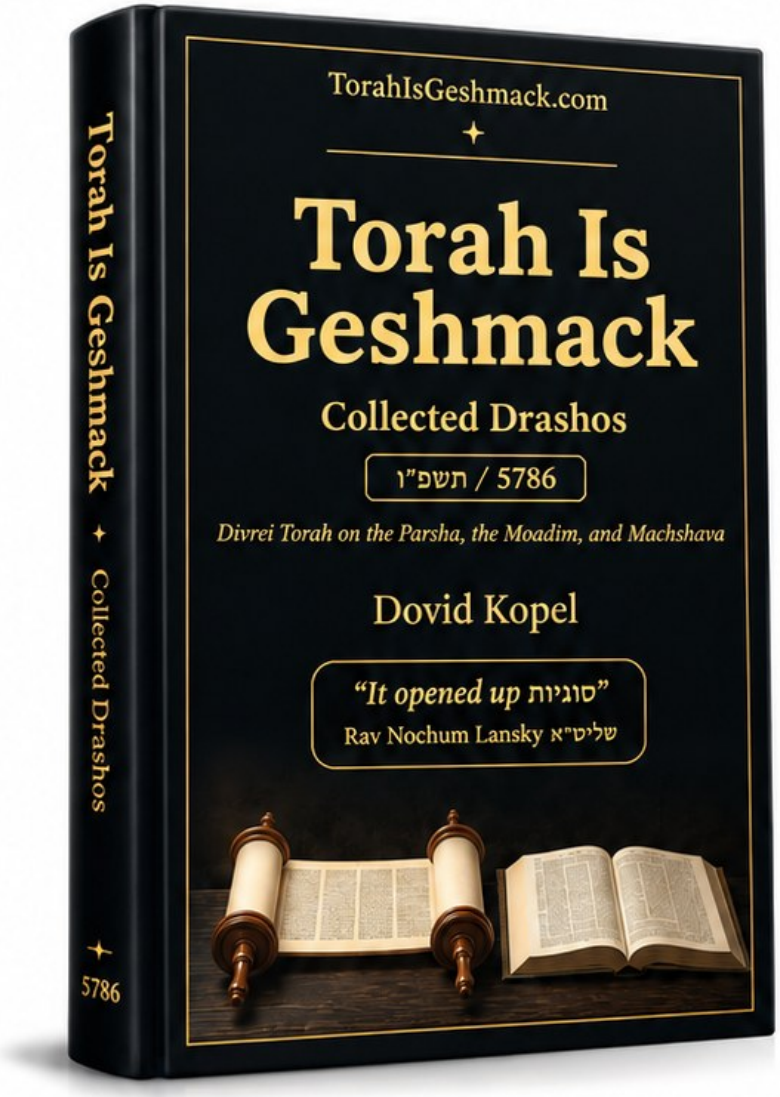
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