TESHUBA: What’s in a word?

Today is the 6th day of Elul, 5770

The concept of Teshuba cannot be translated into English with a single word.

The literal meaning of the Hebrew word Teshuba is ‘return’, in the sense of returning to God Almighty. Whenever we break one of God’s commandments we are deviating from the path which gets us closer to God. Teshuba takes place when we stop, realize that we are going away from God and we make a ‘U turn’ back to Him.

In a more practical sense Teshuba means ‘repentance’, in the sense of looking back, acknowledge our fault and flaws, deeply regret and taking the steps to repair what could be repaired.

Teshuba also means ‘reconciliation’. Our Rabbis insist that once we reconcile with haShem our ‘bond’ with Him becomes stronger. Similar to what happens to a loving couple, if they fight and sincerely reconcile their relationship now might be stronger than what it was before they fought.

Teshuba is one of the 613 ‘commandments’. This implies that our Torah acknowledges that we can’t be saints and infallible but inevitably we will fail and sin.

Teshuba is a process that comprises 3 basic steps: 1. hakarat hachet, admitting that I have done something wrong. 2. vidui: confession, oral articulation of my sins. 3. azibat hachet: changing my behavior. Abandoning my wrong habits.

If I sinned against another human being, the process of Teshuba includes a fourth step: ‘reparation’.