

**Are the Gates of Teshuvah Ever Locked?:  
Maimonides on Friendship, Rebuke, and Teshuvah  
Sarah Zager 8-13-2020**

**I Philosophical Background**

**Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1113a8, 1114a11-5.**

If doing, and likewise not doing, fine or shameful actions is up to us, and if, as we saw, [doing or not doing them] is [what it is] to be a good or bad person, being decent or base is up to us.

...

it is impossible for someone doing injustice not to wish to be unjust, or for someone doing intemperate action to wish to be intemperate...This does not mean, however, that if he is unjust and wishes to stop, he will thereby stop and be just. For neither does a sick person recover his health [simply by wishing]; nonetheless, he is sick willingly, by living incontinently and disobeying the doctors, if that was how it happened. At that time, then, he was free not to be sick, though no longer free once he has let himself go, just as it was up to someone to throw a stone, since the principle was up to him, though he can no longer take it back once he was thrown it. Similarly, then, the person who is [now] unjust or intemperate was originally free not to acquire this character, so that he has it willingly, though once he has acquired the character, he is no longer free to have it [now].

**II Core Text**

Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah 2:1-2	משנה תורה, הלכות ב:א-ב
<p>Twenty-four different transgressions <b>inhibit</b> repentance</p> <p>....</p> <p>Among this group of twenty-four are five transgressions which <b>lock the paths of repentance</b>, they are:</p> <p>(1) <b>One who separates himself from the community,</b></p> <p>(2) <b>One who opposes the decisions of the sages</b></p> <p>(3) <b>One who disdains the <i>mitzvot</i></b></p> <p>(4) <b>One who insults his teachers</b></p> <p>(5) <b>One who hates rebukes</b></p>	<p>ארבעה ועשרים דברים מעכבין את התשובה.</p> <p>...</p> <p>ומהן חמשה דברים הנועלים דרכי התשובה בפני עושיהן. ואלו הן.</p> <p>(א) הפורש מן הצבור</p> <p>(ב) והחולק על דברי חכמים</p> <p>(ג) והמלעיג על המצוות</p> <p>(ד) והמבזה רבותיו</p> <p>(ה) והשונא את התוכחות</p>

**III Darkei Teshuvah?**

<p><b>Lamentations Rabbah 3:15</b></p>	<p>איכה רבה ג:טו</p>
<p>Prayer is compared to a <i>mikveh</i> [ritual bath], and teshuvah is compared to the sea—just as a <i>mikveh</i> is sometimes open and sometimes locked, so too are the gates of prayer sometimes open and sometimes closed. But, just as the sea is always open, so too the gates of <i>teshuvah</i> are always open.</p>	<p>נמשלה תפלה כמקוה ונמשלה תשובה כים. מה מקוה זו פעמים פתוחה פעמים נעולה, כך שערי תפלה פעמים נעולים פעמים פתוחין, אבל הים הזה לעולם פתוח, כך שערי תשובה לעולם פתוחין.</p>

<p><b>Hilkhot Teshuvah 2:4</b></p>	<p>הלכות תשובה ב:ד</p>
<p>Among the ways of repentance are, for the penitent to continue to cry out in tearful supplication before the Name, to bestow alms according to his means, and to distance himself exceedingly from the thing wherein he sinned, to have his identity changed, as if saying: "I am now another person, and not that person who perpetrated those misdeeds", to completely change his conduct for the good and straight path, and to exile himself from his place of residence, for exile atones iniquity, because it leads him to submissiveness and to be meek and humble-spirited.</p>	<p>מדרכי התשובה להיות השב צועק תמיד לפני השם בבכי ובתחנונים ועושה צדקה כפי כחו ומתרחק הרבה מן הדבר שחטא בו ומשנה שמו כלומר אני אחר ואיני אותו האיש שעשה אותו המעשים ומשנה מעשיו כלן לטובה ולדרך ישרה וגולה ממקומו. שגלות מכפרת עון מפני שגורמת לו להכנע ולהיות ענו ושפל רוח:</p>

#### IV: The List, Deconstructed

<p><b>Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah 2:2</b></p>	<p>משנה תורה, הלכות ב:ב</p>
<p>(1) <b>One who separates himself from the community</b>, for he would be absent at the time they repent and could not acquire aught in their virtuous performance;</p> <p>(2) <b>One who opposes the decisions of the sages</b>, for his opposition to them brings about his own separation from them, and he knows not the path leading to repentance;</p> <p>(3) <b>One who disdains the mitzvot</b>, for as they appear debased to him he does not pursue after them nor perform them, and without performance what virtue can he attain?</p>	<p>א) הפורש מן הצבור, לפי שבזמן שייעשו תשובה לא יהיה עמהן ואינו זוכה עמהן בזכות שעושין.</p> <p>ב) והחולק על דברי חכמים, לפי שמחלקתו גורמת לו לפרש מהן ואינו יודע דרכי התשובה.</p> <p>ג) והמלעיג על המצוות, שפיון שנתבזו בעיניו אינו רודף אחריהן ולא עושן ואם לא יעשה במה יזכה.</p>

<p><b>Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah 2:2</b></p>	<p>משנה תורה, הלכות ב:ב</p>
<p>4) <b>One who insults his teachers</b>, for such conduct brings about his displacement and repudiation, even as it happened to Gehazi, and being repudiated he will not find a teacher to guide him to the path of truth;</p>	<p>ד) והמבזה רבותיו, שדבר זה גורם לו לדחפו ולטרונו קגחזי ובזמן שנטרד לא ימצא מלמד ומורה לו דרך האמת.</p>

<p><b>II Kings 5:20, 26-7</b></p>	<p>מלכים ב ה:כ, כו-כז</p>
<p>Gehazi, the attendant of Elisha the man of God, thought: "My master has let that Aramean Naaman off without accepting what he brought! As the LORD lives, I will run after him and get something from him."  ...  Then [Elisha] said to him, "Did not my spirit go along when a man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this a time to take money in order to buy clothing and olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves?  Surely, the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants forever." And as [Gehazi] left his presence, he was snow-white with leprosy.</p>	<p>ויאמר גיחזי נער אלישע איש האלהים הנה א חשך אדני את נעמן הארמי הזה מקחת מידי את אשר הביא חי יהוה כי אם רצתי אחריו ולקחתי מאתו מאומה:  ...  ויאמר אליו לא לבי הלה פאשר הפך איש מעל מרכבתו לקראתך העלת לקחת את הלסף ולקחת בגדים וזיתים וכרמים וצאן ובקר ועבדים ושפחות:  וצרעת נעמן תדבק בך ובזרעך לעולם ויצא מלפניו מצרע כשולג: (ו)</p>

<p><b>Hilkhot Kilayim 10:27</b></p>	<p>הלכות כלאים י:כז</p>
<p>One who sees another person wearing biblically prohibited mixed kinds, stops him and immediately tears his clothes off of him, even if he is walking in the marketplace, and even if he was a teacher who had taught him wisdom.</p>	<p>הרואה כלאים של תורה על חברו אפלו היה מהלך בשוק קופץ לו וקורעו עליו מיד. ואפלו היה רבו שלמדו חכמה.</p>

<p><b>Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah 2:2</b></p>	<p>משנה תורה, הלכות ב:ב</p>
<p>(5) <b>One who hates rebukes</b> for him, indeed, left no path open for repentance, as it is criticism that begets repentance. When a man is informed that his sins are known, and that he should be ashamed of himself for his wrongdoings, he does repent.</p>	<p>ה) והשווא את התוכחות שהרי לא הניח לו דרך תשובה. שהתוכחה גורמת לתשובה שבזמן שמודיעין לו לאדם חטאיו ומקלימין אותו חוזר בתשובה כמו</p>

<p>For example: it written in the Torah: "Remember, forget thou not, how thou didst make the Lord thy God wroth in the wilderness; from the day that thou didst go forth out of the land of Egypt, until ye came unto this place, ye have been rebellious against the Lord" (Deut. 9.7), and: "But the Lord hath not given you a heart to know" (Ibid. 29.3), and: "A foolish people and unwise" (Ibid. 32.6);</p> <p>and Isaiah, likewise, rebuked Israel and exclaimed: "Ah sinful nation!" (Is. 1.4) and, "The ox knoweth his owner" (Ibid. –3), and, "Because I knew that thou are obstinate" (Ibid. 48.4). Almighty, too, charged him to rebuke the sinners, saying: "Cry aloud, spare not" (Is. 58. 1).</p> <p>In like manner did all of the prophets criticise Israel until they turned in repentance. It is, therefore, necessary to appoint over each and every community in Israel a great scholar of mature age, God-fearing since his early youth, and loved by them, people, to preach to the public and turn them to repentance. But he who despises criticism does not come to hear the preacher and does not pay attention to his words, he, therefore, holds on to his sins, which to his eyes appear to be good.</p>	<p>שְׁכַתּוֹב בַּתּוֹרָה (דְּבָרִים ט ז) "זָכֹר (ו) אֶל תִּשְׁכַּח". (דְּבָרִים ט ז) "מִמָּרִים הֵייתֶם". (דְּבָרִים כ ט ג) "וְלֹא נָתַן ה' לְכֶם לֵב". (דְּבָרִים ל ב ו) "עִם נָבֵל וְלֹא חָכָם".</p> <p>וְכֵן יִשְׁעִי הוּא הוֹכִיחַ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַר (יִשְׁעִיָּה א ד) "הוֹי גּוֹי חֹטֵא". (יִשְׁעִיָּה א ג) "יָדַע שׁוֹר קִנְיָו". (יִשְׁעִיָּה מ ח ד) "מִדַּעְתִּי כִי קָשָׁה אֶתָּה". וְכֵן צִוָּהוּ הָאֵל לְהוֹכִיחַ לְחַטָּאִים שְׁנֵאמַר (יִשְׁעִיָּה נ ח א) "קָרָא בְּגֵרוֹן אֵל תִּחְשֶׁה".</p> <p>וְכֵן כָּל הַנְּבִיאִים הוֹכִיחוּ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַד שֶׁחָזְרוּ בַתְּשׁוּבָה. לְפִיכָּה צְרִיךְ לְהַעֲמִיד בְּכָל קֵהֶל וְקֵהֶל מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל חָכָם גְּדוֹל וְזָקֵן וְיֵרָא שְׁמַיִם מְנַעֲרָיו וְאֱהוּב לָהֶם שְׂיֵהָא מוֹכִיחַ לְרַבִּים וּמְחַזְרֵן בַּתְּשׁוּבָה, וְזֶה שְׁשׂוֹנָא אֶת הַתּוֹכַחֵת אֵינוּ בָּא לְמוֹכִיחַ וְלֹא שׁוֹמֵעַ דְּבָרָיו לְפִיכָּה יַעֲמַד בְּחַטָּאֵתָיו שְׁהֵם בְּעֵינָיו טוֹבִים:</p>
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## V Coda: Aristotle and the Rambam on Friendship

### Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1156b 6-10

"Complete friendship is the friendship of good people similar in virtue, for they wish goods in the same way to each other insofar as they are good, and they are good in their own sight."

Commentary on Mishnah Avot, 1:6	פירוש המשניות א:ו
<p>And he said, "acquire for yourself a friend". He said it with an expression of acquisition and he did not say, "Make for yourself a friend," or "Befriend others." The intention of this is that a person must acquire a friend for himself, so that all of his deeds and all of his matters be refined through him, as they said (Taanit 23a), "Either a friend or death."</p>	<p>ואמר וקנה לך חבר זכר אותו בלשון קנייה ולא אמר עשה לך חבר או התחבר לאחרים הכונה בזה שצריך לאדם שיקנה אוהב לעצמו שיתקנו בו מעשיו וכל עניניו כמו שאמרו או חברותא או מיתותא ... בחבירו בהגיע הטוב ההוא לשניהם יחד וזה האוהב אשר צוה לקנותו והוא כאהבת הרב לתלמיד והתלמיד לרב:</p>

<p>...</p> <p>And this is the friend which he commanded to acquire; and it is like the love of the master for the student and of the student for the master.</p>	
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