

## Returning to Ourselves: Appreciating Our Greatness as *Baalei Teshuvah*

### Berachot 34b & Sanhedrin 99a

מְקוֹם שֶׁבַעֲלֵי תְּשׁוּבָה עוֹמְדִין צְדִיקִים גְּמוּרִים אֵינָם עוֹמְדִין

“The place where *baalei teshuvah* stand, the completely righteous cannot stand.”

Two understandings of this concept:

1 - This is only dealing with “real” *baalei teshuvah* – those who were raised Torah observant, totally fell out of the fold, and then came back.

2 - No, this also includes those who came from non-observant backgrounds, boldly changed their lives, and now are Torah observant.

For our purposes, we’re going to learn like the second view. (However, it’s worth noting that while many agree with this position there are those who disagree with it.)

### Rabbi Noach Orlowek’s Mountain Climber *Mashal*

Imagine you’re a mountain climber, and you’re ready to ascend to the top of the biggest and toughest mountain you’ve ever climbed. You’ve spent years training for this. You’ve spent tons of money on the best gear. You’ve packed all the food you need and rationed it perfectly for each day of the climb. After several days of the most arduous climb of your life, you finally reach the summit. You’re grinning from ear to ear, with sweat pouring down your face while panting and out of breath. As you stand on the top, you notice a small child. Confused as to how such a small youngster could climb such a mountain, you ask: “How did you get here?” The boy, equally puzzled at such a question, responds: “I was born here.”

### Analyzing the *Mashal*

A - What makes us uniquely special as BTs is that we worked tooth and nail to get up the mountain! (Every test, every weird shayla, etc.)

B - Of course, we must respect and emulate those “born on the mountain,” but it’s equally incumbent upon us to appreciate how great our climb was (and still is)!

C - This place on the mountain—wherever we find ourselves—is the *makom* that only *baalei teshuvah* can stand in!

D - The FFB and BT can be “standing” on the “top of the mountain,” but it “feels” completely different when you worked tirelessly to get there (e.g. the very sins we turned away from and bold life choices we made).

E - Celebrate your greatness! See how far you’ve come! Like *Pirkei Avot* (5:23) tells us, “לְפִיּוֹם צָעָדָא אֲגָרָא”—according to the pain/exertion is the reward.”

Note: Watch out! NONE of this should be used to think that BTs are “better” than FFBs! Not having to go through such tests makes FFBs purer and possibly more kadosh than BTs can ever hope to be! Don’t get arrogant!

**What Baalei Teshuvah Can Do for the World** (from Rabbi Gershenfeld at the Baal Teshuvah Achdut Event at Ohr Somayach)

- 1 - We can teach people about teshuvah (we are living breathing examples of it)
- 2 - We can give people energy and hope for the future (being inspirational)
- 3 - We can show people how they should live their lives (honest in business, great husbands, great fathers, good middot, being a kiddush Hashem, etc.)
- 4 - We can teach Torah to others
- 5 - We can bind together and create a teshuvah movement in the world (like Rav Schiller, Rav Weinberg, Rav Weinbach, and Rav Rosenberg wanted)

### **Early Rosh Hashanah Message...**

Teshuvah is not merely the removal of sins, it’s also coming back to ourselves—returning to the essence of who we are.

As we approach Rosh Hashanah, we should be trembling out of awe, but we should also joyfully stand before Hashem and say, “Abba, look how I changed my life for you! I’m still climbing! It’s hard, but I’m still trying!”