

# The First Shabbos Shuva

## *How Teshuvah Turns the Night Into Light*

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Based on a Shabbos Shuva teaching of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, as presented by Rabbi Eliyahu Wolf

### The Opening Question

I want to begin this afternoon with a trivia question. It sounds historical, but it is really a question about us.

#### **What was the first Shabbos Shuva in the history of the world?**

Do not answer too quickly. Was it the Shabbos between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in the year of the Giving of the Torah? Was it the Shabbos after Moshe Rabbeinu came down with the second luchos? Was it the first Shabbos on which Jews gathered in a shul and heard a rabbi speak for an hour?

The answer is much earlier. The first Shabbos Shuva was the first Shabbos in the history of the world.

That is not simply a clever answer. It means that Shabbos and teshuvah were joined from the beginning. Before there was a Jewish calendar, before there was a Machzor, before there was a Yom Kippur service, the first human being entered the first Shabbos already needing to return. If we understand what happened on that Shabbos, we will understand what every Shabbos Shuva is asking from us.

### The Sixth Day of Creation Was Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah is not the anniversary of the first day of Creation. Chazal teach that the world began on the twenty-fifth of Elul. Rosh Hashanah, the first of Tishrei, was the sixth day—the day on which Adam HaRishon was created. That is why in the Rosh Hashanah davening we say, “היום הרת עולם”: today is the day on which the human story truly came into being.

The Gemara describes that first day hour by hour. Adam was formed, received life, stood upright, was commanded, sinned, was judged, and was granted mercy—all before sunset. Humanity did not enjoy a long period of innocence. On the very day that the human being appeared, so did command, freedom, temptation, failure, judgment, and the possibility of beginning again.

If Rosh Hashanah that year was Friday, then the following day—the first Shabbos—was the second day of Tishrei. It stood inside the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah. The first Shabbos was therefore literally the first Shabbos Shuva.

But the calendar is only the surface. The deeper point is that Adam entered Shabbos after the most catastrophic day imaginable. He had been given one command and had violated it. Death had entered human experience. He had been sent from Gan Eden. The world after Friday was not the world that had existed before Friday.

**The first person did not enter the first Shabbos with a perfect week behind him. He entered Shabbos carrying a broken world.**

## The Song Each Day Sings

To see what Shabbos did, we have to look at something familiar enough that we may no longer notice its depth: the Shir Shel Yom. Every morning we introduce it by saying, “היום יום... בשבת,” “Shabbos is today.” Each day has its song because each day reveals a different aspect of Creation and a different way of recognizing its Creator.

The Gemara in Rosh Hashanah explains the sequence. On Sunday, when heaven and earth came into being and Hashem acquired His world, the Levi'im sang “לה' הארץ ומלואה”—the earth and all it contains belong to Hashem. Monday's separation of the upper and lower waters is answered by the Psalm of Hashem's city and His greatness. On Tuesday the dry land appeared and became a place of judgment and habitation, so the song speaks of Hashem standing in the assembly of judges. On Wednesday the sun, moon, and stars were placed in the heavens, and the Psalm calls for justice against those who worship the heavenly bodies. On Thursday living creatures filled sea and sky, and the song calls out, “הרנינו לאלקים עוזנו,” because the created world had begun to teem with voices of praise.

Then comes Friday. Creation is complete. The human being stands at its center and can look at the entire world and recognize a King. Chazal describe Adam gathering the creatures and crowning Hashem over them. Friday's song is Psalm 93:

תהלים צג: ה' מֶלֶךְ גָּאוֹת לְבָשׁ; לְבַשׁ ה' עֹז הַתְּאֵזָר, אֶף תִּכּוֹן תִּבְלָל בִּלְ תִּמּוֹט.

“Hashem is King; He has clothed Himself in grandeur.” The Gemara says this song was chosen because on Friday Hashem completed His work and reigned over it. The world is no longer a collection of pieces. It has become a kingdom.

One might therefore expect the song of Shabbos simply to celebrate that completed perfection. Instead, Shabbos has a song that introduces a new category:

תהלים צב: מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר לַיּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת. טוֹב לְהַדוֹת לַה' וּלְזַמֵּר לְשִׁמְךָ עֲלֵינוּ.

Chazal describe it as a song for “the day that is entirely Shabbos and rest for everlasting life”—the future world. Shabbos does not merely complete the six days. It opens a window beyond them. It allows the world to taste what it was meant to become.

This is why the daily songs matter to our theme. Friday says: look at a world completed under the Kingship of Hashem. Shabbos says something still greater: look at that same world after it has been gathered into its purpose. Friday celebrates a finished creation. Shabbos reveals a creation that can return to its source.

## Shabbos Is the Movement of Return

Chassidus notices a simple resonance in the word itself. The letters of שבת can be heard as תשוב—“you shall return.” This is not offered as grammar. It is a spiritual reading of what Shabbos does. During the week, life travels outward. A person moves into work, pressure, errands, appetite, conflict, ambition, and distraction. The world feels like many separate demands. Shabbos gathers all that outward movement and brings it home.

That is teshuvah in its most literal sense: not punishment and not self-hatred, but return. Teshuvah means that the soul that has become scattered remembers where it belongs. The week is not erased; it is elevated. The food, the home, the family, the work, and even the struggle of the week are brought into a day in which their inner purpose can be heard.

## Shabbos returns the week. Teshuvah returns the person.

That is why the first Shabbos could receive Adam after the first sin. Shabbos did not restore Friday morning as though nothing had happened. It did something more profound. It took Adam as he now was—after command, failure, fear, judgment, and exile—and showed him that even this life could still face its Creator.

## Adam Learns What Teshuvah Means

There is a Midrash that connects Adam HaRishon to the Psalm of Shabbos. After Kayin killed Hevel, Hashem judged him. Later Adam met Kayin and asked, “What happened with your judgment?” Kayin answered, “I did teshuvah and reached a compromise; the severity was softened.” Adam struck his face in astonishment and said, “So great is the power of teshuvah, and I did not know!” Immediately, says the Midrash, Adam stood and said, “מזמור שיר ליום השבת.”

We have to preserve the chronology carefully. Adam did not meet Kayin during that first Shabbos. Kayin’s story came later. Adam first lived through Shabbos; only afterward, when he witnessed the effect of Kayin’s teshuvah, did he understand what that Shabbos had meant. The experience came before the explanation.

Why did the discovery of teshuvah lead Adam specifically to Psalm 92? Because Adam suddenly understood that Shabbos is not only the song of a flawless world. It is the song a damaged world can still sing. It is the capacity of Creation to return after it has traveled somewhere it should never have gone.

Notice the shock in Adam’s response. Kayin had committed an act from which there was no earthly reversal. He could not bring Hevel back. Teshuvah did not pretend that the act was unreal, nor did it remove every consequence. But it changed Kayin’s relationship to his act and to Hashem. It opened a road where Adam had assumed there could only be a wall.

**Teshuvah does not say that the past did not happen. It says that the past does not get the final word.**

## Thirty-Six Hours of Light

The Midrash gives us another extraordinary description of that first Shabbos. On the first Friday, the primordial light served for twelve hours. When Friday evening arrived, the light did not disappear. It continued through the twelve hours of Friday night and the twelve hours of Shabbos day. Only at the end of Shabbos did darkness fall. Adam then feared that the darkness had come because of his sin, until Hashem gave him the wisdom to strike stones together and discover fire.

The first Shabbos, therefore, did not have an experienced night. There was a night on the clock, but it shone like day. The verse describes precisely such a condition:

תהלים קלט:יב: גַּם חֹשֶׁךְ לֹא יַחֲשִׁיךְ מִמֶּךָ, וְלַיְלָה כַּיּוֹם יֵאִיר; כְּחֹשֶׁךְ לַיְלָה.

“Even darkness is not dark to You; the night shines like day; darkness and light are alike.” This does not mean there is no night. It means that the night itself becomes luminous.

That is the image at the center of this drash. The first Shabbos Shuva came after the darkest event in the young history of the world, yet its night was filled with light. Adam could not go back

to the morning before the sin. But he could discover that Hashem had not abandoned him in the night after the sin.

**Teshuvah does not always remove the darkness. It teaches the darkness how to shine.**

There are forms of religious language that speak only about escape: leave the low place, forget the failure, rise above the part of life that embarrasses you. Teshuvah is more demanding. It asks us to take responsibility for the darkness and then uncover what can be born from within it: humility that did not exist before, empathy for another person's struggle, honesty without performance, dependence on Hashem, a hunger that complacent innocence could never produce.

The baal teshuvah does not possess a cleaner biography than the tzaddik. The baal teshuvah possesses a biography in which distance itself has been turned into longing. The very awareness of how far one has wandered generates a force of return that may be more intense than the steady movement of someone who never experienced that distance.

## The Most Difficult Question: נורא עלילה

And now we arrive at the most difficult question in this entire discussion. It is a question we must not soften, because if we soften it we also weaken the astonishing claim of teshuvah.

**How could Adam HaRishon possibly have committed this sin?**

Adam was not a confused person born into a damaged culture. He was fashioned directly by Hashem. He saw a world still transparent to its Source. He had one command. How could a person of that stature, in that environment, on the very day of his creation, fail?

The same question appears in other decisive failures in Tanach. How could the generation that stood at Sinai and heard "אנכי ה' אלקיך" produce a Golden Calf? How could David HaMelech, the sweet singer of Israel and one of the great pillars of our people, fall into the episode for which he spent the rest of his life doing teshuvah?

Tehillim gives us a phrase that Chazal and Chassidus take with enormous seriousness:

תהלים סו:ה: לכו וראו מפעלות אלקים; נוכח עלילה על בני אדם.

"Go and see the works of Hashem; awesome is His design upon human beings." The word עלילה can mean an act or design, but it can also suggest a pretext, a chain of circumstances arranged toward an outcome. The Midrash makes the idea explicit. Long before Adam sinned, the Torah already contained the reality of death. On the verse "נורא עלילה על בני אדם," the Midrash says that the consequence was present in the Divine plan and then "the pretext was attached to him"—עלילה נתלה בו. Adam remained the person who chose and sinned, yet his failure entered a story larger than his private appetite.

That sounds dangerous. It can sound as though Adam was set up, as though responsibility disappears, or as though sin is secretly holy. None of those conclusions is acceptable. But neither may we ignore what Chazal are telling us.

## Failures That Do Not Fit the Person

The Gemara in Avodah Zarah says that David was not naturally suited to that sin, and the Jewish people were not naturally suited to the Golden Calf. Why, then, did these events occur?

So that the path of teshuvah would be opened for individuals and for the community. Rashi uses unusually forceful language: “גזירת מלך היתה”—it was a decree of the King that the yetzer hara overpower them, in order to provide an opening for those who would later repent.

This does not mean they had no choice. If they had no choice, there would be no sin, no confession, no consequence, and no teshuvah. The Gemara itself treats them as responsible. It means that certain failures cannot be understood only by measuring the person's ordinary character against the temptation. Something in the test was intensified because history needed the path of return to be revealed.

The Mittlerer Rebbe develops this idea in Toras Chaim. There are moments, he explains, when a person encounters an overpowering yetzer hara that is not proportionate to his previous spiritual state. From Above, the evil inclination may be stirred and strengthened in order to bring the person into the terrain where a deeper return becomes possible. Yet the person's free choice is not abolished. Reward, punishment, and responsibility remain real.

### **There are tests that are not evenly balanced.**

We know something of this from ordinary life. A person can be placed under a combination of pressure, exhaustion, loneliness, fear, access, humiliation, or craving that makes the wrong choice frighteningly likely. “Likely” is not “compelled.” The final act remains the person's act. But an honest moral account must describe both truths: the person chose, and the test was loaded.

### **Hashem can load the test without choosing the answer.**

The test may be arranged from Above. The possibility of failure may be part of the architecture of the world. Assistance that the person once felt may be concealed. But the final choice is never made from Above. At the point of action, the person is answerable for what he does.

## **Hashem's Will and Hashem's Purpose**

Chassidus gives us language for holding the paradox. A sin is always contrary to Hashem's רצון—the Divine will as command. Hashem says, “Do not do this.” That remains absolutely true. Yet the existence of a world in which sin is possible, and the eventual transformation that teshuvah can produce, may serve the deeper כוונה—the ultimate purpose for which the descent was permitted to exist.

We must not collapse רצון and כוונה into each other. If I say, “Hashem ultimately wants the light that can emerge afterward, therefore He wanted me to sin,” I have falsified the Torah. Hashem's will at the moment of temptation is that I resist. The mitzvah is real. The aveirah is real. I am required to choose life.

But once the sin has occurred, another truth becomes relevant: Hashem's purpose is not defeated. The failure can become raw material for a form of closeness that could not have existed before. Not because evil becomes good, but because the person uses the force of teshuvah to transform the meaning and direction of what happened.

**Before the fall, נורא עלילה gives me no permission to sin. After the fall, it gives me no permission to despair.**

## Why Permit a Descent at All?

Why would the Divine plan contain such a frightening possibility? Because there are revelations that can be received only after concealment, and dimensions of the soul that emerge only when the person must choose Hashem from a place where Hashem is not obvious.

Before the sin, Adam lived in revealed light. After the sin, the world became thick, resistant, and dark. If a human being can now take that resistant world and freely turn it toward Hashem, the bond is no longer merely the response of a creature surrounded by revelation. It becomes the self-generated cry of a soul that has known distance and refuses to remain there.

The difference can be seen in the luchos. The first luchos were “the work of Hashem,” miraculous from beginning to end. They were shattered after the Golden Calf. The second luchos came after Moshe’s pleading, the revelation of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, and eighty days of human teshuvah. Moshe had to carve the stones. Chazal teach that with the second luchos came an expansion of Torah—halachah, midrash, and aggadah. The second gift emerged through human labor and could enter the world more deeply.

No one would therefore recommend the Golden Calf. No one would call the first luchos expendable. But once they were broken, the result was not simply a poorer copy. Through teshuvah, an even deeper covenant entered the world.

### **The descent itself becomes part of the ascent.**

That is why both the whole luchos and the broken luchos were placed in the Aron. The broken pieces were not worshipped, excused, or displayed as trophies. They were carried within the holiest vessel because, after teshuvah, even the history of rupture belonged inside the covenant. The Jew does not have to amputate his past in order to come close to Hashem. He has to bring it into the Aron in a transformed form.

## The Boundary That Protects the Entire Idea

At this point the Mishnah in Yoma gives the indispensable boundary: “אומר אחטא ואשוב, אחטא—אין מספיק בידו לעשות תשובה ואשוב.” One who says, “I will sin and then repent,” is not given the opportunity in the ordinary way. Teshuvah cannot be turned into advance permission. The moment I use the future possibility of return to authorize the present aveirah, I am not descending for the sake of ascent; I am manipulating teshuvah itself.

נורא עלילה is therefore a truth to be used retrospectively, with trembling. It speaks to the person who has already fallen and asks, “Is my life now outside the Divine purpose?” The answer is no. It does not speak to the person standing before the sin and offer an excuse. At that moment the only message is: choose correctly; rise to the occasion; do not fall.

There may be times when Hashem places a person in a test that, unless he rises far beyond his accustomed strength, will overwhelm him. The demand is precisely that he rise. If he succeeds, he has revealed a strength he did not know he possessed. If he fails, he is responsible—and he is then summoned to reveal an even deeper strength through teshuvah.

This is not a theology of entrapment. It is a theology in which Hashem refuses to let either success or failure be spiritually wasted.

## When Sins Become Merits

The Gemara in Yoma teaches that when teshuvah is done from love, intentional sins can be transformed into merits. It does not mean that the forbidden act becomes retrospectively permitted. It means that the distance created by the act produces such longing, such humility, and such a reorientation of life that the memory of the sin now drives the person toward Hashem. The sin supplied the distance; teshuvah changed the direction of its energy.

A person who once used intelligence to rationalize can learn to use that same intelligence to expose self-deception. A person whose intensity carried him toward destruction can redirect that intensity toward kedushah. A person whose failure broke his image of himself may finally pray without pretending. None of that makes the sin good. It reveals that teshuvah is powerful enough to deny evil permanent ownership of the forces it captured.

There are three sentences a person must learn to say in the correct order:

**“I did it” is confession. “I must repair it” is responsibility. “That is all I am” is despair.**

The first two are foundations of teshuvah. The third is a refusal to believe in the soul Hashem gave me. The fact that my sin does not define my essence does not reduce my responsibility. It increases it. If the sin is not who I truly am, I am responsible to stop living beneath who I truly am.

That is the full force of נורא עלילה. I am not the author of every circumstance that shaped my test. I am the author of my answer. If I answered badly, I remain the author of what happens next. The question is not whether the fall occurred. The question is: will my fall become the place where I remain—or will it become the place from which I rise?

## The Man Inside the Store

Rabbi Yechiel Spero relates an extraordinary story that was told at the levayah of a baal teshuvah. The man had returned to Yiddishkeit many years earlier and had built a Torah family. At the levayah, one of the maspidim revealed how his entire journey had begun.

He had grown up in secular America with almost no connection to Yiddishkeit. One day he passed a storefront whose window displayed images that were completely inappropriate. He stopped to look. Then he went inside.

That detail matters. He was not safely standing outside the darkness and analyzing it from a distance. **He had entered it.** He was now inside the very place that was pulling him downward.

From inside the store, he could see the people walking past the window. Many glanced toward it. Then a young ben Torah approached. The young man clearly noticed what was there, but instead of allowing his eyes to follow the temptation, he deliberately turned his head away and continued walking.

The secular Jew watched him and had a completely unexpected reaction. He did not think, ‘How restricted that religious boy must be.’ He thought: **‘What must he possess that is more powerful and more satisfying than what is inside this store? What kind of life gives a person the strength to walk past this and not need it? I have to discover what he has.’**

That question began his journey. He eventually became a baal teshuvah and raised a Torah-observant family—not only for one generation, but for generations to come.

And the young ben Torah who walked past the window never knew. He experienced a private moment of gevurah, perhaps struggled for several seconds, turned his head, and continued down the street. He probably forgot the incident before the day was over. But without delivering a lecture, without entering the store, and without ever meeting the man who was watching him, **he had changed the spiritual direction of an entire family.**

One day, in the Olam HaEmes, he may be shown children, grandchildren, Torah, mitzvos, and Jewish homes that came from that moment—and he will ask, ‘What do these have to do with me?’ And he will be told: **‘They began when you turned your head.’**

But there is another side to the story. We may never say that entering that store was permissible or that a person should enter darkness in order to discover light. Standing before the test, his obligation was to remain outside. Yet once he had entered, Hashem did not surrender him to the place he had chosen. Precisely because he now knew the attraction of that darkness from within, the sight of a Jew refusing it struck him with a force it might never otherwise have possessed. **The darkness became the place from which he first recognized light.**

That is *נורא עלילה* without excuse and without despair. The fall remained a fall. The store did not become holy. But the person who entered it was not abandoned there. Something deeper in his neshamah saw the young man outside and said: ‘That is the life I want.’ The place of descent became the birthplace of return.

## The Tzaddik Who Never Disappeared

We can now understand a central Chassidic teaching about the Jewish soul. The verse says, “ועמך כולם צדיקים”—Your people are all tzaddikim. This does not deny the obvious differences between people, nor does it mean every action is righteous. It means that beneath conduct, habit, and even sin, the essential bond between a Jew and Hashem remains intact.

Chazal say, “אתם קרוין אדם”—the Jewish people are called Adam. The name of Adam HaRishon is therefore not only the name of the first individual. His story exposes the story of every Jewish soul: essentially bound to Hashem, yet placed in a world where that bond can be concealed by conduct.

The Zohar hears astonishment in the Torah’s words “ונפש כי תחטא”—“Can a soul sin?” The body, appetite, and habits can pull a person into sin, but the essential soul itself does not desire separation from Hashem. This is why sin produces an inner contradiction rather than a new identity.

A sin can cover that bond. It can contradict it. It can make the person live in a way that is painfully foreign to his own essence. But it cannot manufacture a new essence. The pintele Yid, the *נקודת היהדות*, is not the reward for good behavior. It is the Divine identity from which teshuvah becomes possible.

This is not flattering psychology. It is a demand. If a person were essentially identical with his lowest act, then change would be self-betrayal. Torah says the opposite: remaining trapped in the lowest act is self-betrayal. Teshuvah is the return of conduct to identity.

**My deepest self is not an excuse for what I did. It is the reason I can no longer tolerate living that way.**

That hidden tzaddik is what stirred in Adam when he entered Shabbos. The world outside him had changed; the world inside him had been wounded; but the essential relationship had not been erased. Shabbos gave that relationship room to breathe again.

## Why Mashiach Comes to Bring Tzaddikim to Teshuvah

The Zohar offers a statement that initially sounds impossible: Mashiach will come “לאַתבא צדיקיא” —to bring tzaddikim to teshuvah. We normally imagine Mashiach coming for sinners, for the alienated, or for a broken world. Why do tzaddikim need teshuvah?

There are two complementary answers, and we need both.

First, the coming of Mashiach reveals the hidden tzaddik within every Jew. Redemption is not Hashem replacing the Jewish people with better people. It is the unveiling of what was present but concealed. The Jew who looked spiritually unreachable discovers that his distance was never his final identity. In that sense, Mashiach brings “tzaddikim” to teshuvah: he brings the concealed tzaddik within every Jew into an open life of return.

Second, actual tzaddikim will do teshuvah. Teshuvah does not mean only leaving sin. It means returning to Hashem without limit. A tzaddik may have served Hashem for an entire lifetime with extraordinary purity, yet every achieved level can become a boundary. A new revelation makes yesterday’s closeness feel like distance. The tzaddik does teshuvah not for rebellion but for finitude—for having accepted a measure when Hashem is beyond measure.

**The true opposite of teshuvah is not sin. The true opposite of teshuvah is believing that I have spiritually arrived.**

That is why Shabbos Shuva is not addressed only to the person with an obvious crisis. It speaks to the observant Jew, the learned Jew, the devoted Jew, and the rabbi. It asks: has yesterday’s sincerity become today’s complacency? Have I converted a living relationship into a respectable routine? Is there a place where I no longer expect to grow because I have decided that this is simply who I am?

A sinner returns from estrangement. A tzaddik returns from limitation. Mashiach reveals that both movements are part of one infinite return.

## What Teshuvah Does to a Person, Mashiach Does to History

We often speak of personal teshuvah and the coming of Mashiach as two topics. Chassidus shows that they are the same movement on different scales.

A person doing teshuvah looks at a part of life that seems detached from Hashem and returns it to its source. Geulah looks at centuries of concealment, exile, violence, confusion, and unfinished holiness and reveals that history itself can return to its Source. Redemption does not declare that exile was harmless. It brings exile to the purpose it could not reveal while it remained exile.

The first Shabbos gives the pattern. Friday ends in sin and judgment. Shabbos does not erase Friday. It gathers Friday into a greater light. In the same way, Mashiach does not discard the long human journey and begin with a blank world. The world we struggled within becomes the dwelling place in which Hashem is revealed.

## Shabbos returns the week. Teshuvah returns the person. Mashiach returns history.

This is why a genuine act of teshuvah is already an act of redemption. Every time a person recovers a prayer that had become empty, repairs a relationship damaged by pride, returns stolen money, gives up a hidden habit, or brings a neglected capacity into service of Hashem, a small piece of the world has moved from exile to geulah.

### יפוצו מעיינותיך חוצה: Bringing the Spring Outside

The Baal Shem Tov records that he asked Mashiach, “When will the Master come?” The answer was: “לכשיפוצו מעיינותיך חוצה”—when your wellsprings spread outward. The phrase comes from Mishlei:

משלי ה:טז: יפוצו מעיינותיך חוצה; ברחבות פלגי מים.

A spring is not water carried from somewhere else. It is water emerging from a living source. Chassidus seeks to uncover the פנימיות התורה—the inner Divine life of Torah—and allow that spring to flow outward. But “outside” has several meanings, and each belongs to our Shabbos Shuva.

#### The Outside Within Me

There is an inner part of a person that prays, learns, and wants closeness. Then there is an “outside”: the reactions that emerge under pressure, the business conduct no one in shul sees, the tone used at home, the use of a phone when lonely, the resentment rehearsed in private, the body’s habits, and the places that appear unrelated to holiness.

יפוצו מעיינותיך חוצה means that the spring must reach those places. It is not enough to have an authentic spiritual core if the core does not irrigate speech, money, appetite, marriage, parenting, and time. Teshuvah is the movement by which the inner truth travels outward until the external life begins to resemble the essential soul.

#### The Outside of the Ordinary World

The six weekdays can feel “outside” the sanctuary of Shabbos. Chassidus does not ask us to abandon them. It asks us to reveal their Shabbos. The work of the week can provide tzedakah, integrity, creativity, and service. Food can become a seudah and strength for a mitzvah. A home can become a mikdash me’at. The ordinary world is not merely an obstacle on the route to holiness; it is the material holiness came to transform.

In the language of Chassidus, sparks of kedushah have fallen into places that appear low, distant, or spiritually empty. When a Jew uses a physical object, an ordinary hour, or a difficult circumstance in the service of Hashem, he does not merely escape the outside. He redeems the spark concealed there and returns it to its source.

This is why the first Shabbos did not destroy the world that had become dark. It filled the night with light. The goal was never a spirituality that exists only where darkness has been excluded. The goal is “לילה כיום יאיר”—that the place called night should itself reveal light.

#### The Outside of the World

Finally, חוצה means the farthest outside: the person who has never tasted the spring, the culture that assumes Hashem is absent, and the physical world that appears to exist on its own.

The coming of Mashiach depends on the wellsprings reaching there because the ultimate purpose is not that a small circle of holy people escape into an inner chamber. It is that the entire world become conscious of the One who gives it life.

This is the Chabad contribution to the meaning of teshuvah. Return is not retreat. The deeper the spring, the farther it must flow. The more inward the teaching, the more capable it is of illuminating what looked external. The test of פנימיות is not whether it remains pure by staying protected, but whether its purity is powerful enough to enter the street without losing its source.

יפוצו מעיינותיך חוצה **returns the outside itself.**

Now the full movement becomes visible: Shabbos returns the week. Teshuvah returns the person. Mashiach returns history. יפוצו מעיינותיך חוצה returns the outside itself. They are not four unrelated subjects. They are four concentric circles of one Divine movement—from fragmentation to source, from darkness to revealed purpose.

## What This Shabbos Gives Us Before It Ends

Rav Wolf brings the Megillah's description of the days of Purim: "והימים האלה נזכרים ונעשים"—these days are remembered and they are enacted. Chassidus explains that when a sacred time returns, we do not merely commemorate something that once happened. The spiritual force of the original event becomes active again.

That is what is happening on this Shabbos Shuva. The first Shabbos did not simply teach Adam an idea about teshuvah. It gave him the power to return after the world had become dark. When Shabbos Shuva returns each year, that same power is renewed: the power to uncover the tzaddik who remains beneath the failure, to turn darkness toward light, and to bring the coming year—with its weekdays, pressures, and ordinary places—back toward Hashem.

**Shabbos Shuva does not merely tell us that return is possible. It supplies the spiritual strength to begin returning.**

And this is not a talk about a day that has already passed. We are still inside Shabbos Shuva. When this drash ends, Shabbos will not be over. We still have Shalosh Seudos and the final stretch before Havdalah. Those are not leftover minutes. They are part of the gift.

At Shalosh Seudos, we do not need to solve our entire lives. We can take one honest place of darkness and carry it into the singing, the quiet, and the remaining holiness of Shabbos. Before Havdalah, each person can form one concrete decision: one repair, one conversation, one boundary, one mitzvah, or one practice through which the light of this Shabbos will enter the coming week.

Then Havdalah will not mean that Shabbos Shuva is finished. It will mean that Shabbos Shuva is being sent with us. The light moves from the inner chamber into the week—exactly the movement of יפוצו מעיינותיך חוצה.

## The Avodah of This Shabbos Shuva

The purpose of a drash at this hour is not to leave us with an impressive theory of Adam HaRishon. It is to help each of us identify the place where this first Shabbos is happening again.

We can ask ourselves four questions.

| Question                                                             | What it asks of me                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What challenge required me to become greater than I had been before? | Perhaps I resent the challenge because it exposed weakness. But perhaps it also demanded a prayer, courage, honesty, or discipline that comfort would never have summoned.    |
| Where have I allowed what I did to define who I am?                  | Responsibility says, "I did this, and I must repair it." Despair says, "This is what I am." Those are not the same sentence.                                                  |
| What light can now emerge specifically from where I struggled?       | Not a justification of the failure, but a new sensitivity, humility, vigilance, compassion, or strength that could make the repaired life deeper than the untouched life.     |
| What part of my "outside" has not yet been reached by my wellspring? | Where is Judaism sincere but compartmentalized? What would it look like for the inner point to reach one concrete pattern of speech, money, time, family, or private conduct? |

The answer should not be a sweeping resolution designed to survive only until Maariv. Choose one place where the spring can reach the outside. Choose one repair that says the past will not have the final word. Choose one practice that allows the hidden tzaddik to become visible.

And if the first answer that comes to mind is, "I have tried before," remember Adam. The first Shabbos was not given to a person with an unbroken record. It was given precisely to the person who had already discovered how terribly a human being can fail.

## The Table Was Still Waiting

There is one final story, told about a religious family in Bnei Brak. They had a son named Avrumi who was struggling deeply with his Yiddishkeit. On Erev Pesach, after an argument with his siblings, Avrumi ran away from home.

The house was ready for the Seder. The table had been set, the matzos and wine were waiting, and the entire family was prepared for the holiest night of the Jewish home. But one chair was empty.

The father went to the Steipler Gaon at the Lederman shul and asked what he should do. The Steipler gave him one instruction: **'Wait.'**

The father returned home. The family sat around the untouched Seder table and waited. They did not begin. An hour passed, and then another. After approximately two hours, the father returned to the Steipler and explained that Avrumi had still not come home. Again the Steipler told him: **'Wait.'**

They waited for nearly another two hours. Then there was a knock at the door.

Avrumi stood outside. He looked at his father and asked quietly: **'Abba, can I come home?'**

His father opened the door. Avrumi entered and saw the table exactly as it had been prepared. The wine was untouched. The matzah was untouched. His father, his mother, and all his siblings were still sitting there.

He could not believe it. 'You waited for me?'

His father answered, **'Of course we waited for you.'**

Avrumi fell into his father's arms. That night became the beginning of his return.

That is where we are this afternoon. Shabbos Shuva is not merely the Shabbos on which we are commanded to return. It is the Shabbos on which we discover that Hashem has been waiting for us to return.

We may feel that too much of the year has already passed, that we have disappointed Hashem too many times, or that the door through which we once could have entered has already closed. But we are still inside Shabbos Shuva. We still have Shalosh Seudos. We still have the quiet final hour before Havdalah. **The table has not been cleared.**

Hashem is not asking us to explain why we left before permitting us to knock. He is waiting for the one honest sentence that begins every return: **‘Abba, can I come home?’**

And the answer of Shabbos Shuva is: **‘Of course. I was waiting for you.’**

## Closing: Return to the First Question

Let us return to the trivia question with which we began. What was the first Shabbos Shuva in the history of the world?

It was the first Shabbos.

The first Shabbos arrived after the first Rosh Hashanah, after the first command, after the first sin, after the first judgment, and after the first human being learned that the world could no longer be what it had been. Yet that Shabbos did not arrive in darkness. For thirty-six hours, the night shone like day.

That first Shabbos established the grammar of return. We cannot return to the beginning as though nothing happened. Teshuvah asks something greater. Take everything that happened. Accept responsibility without excuse. Refuse despair without denial. Uncover the Divine purpose still waiting within the place of struggle. Bring the week home. Bring the person home. Bring the outside home. Bring history home.

The world says that a broken past narrows the future. Teshuvah says that when the brokenness is faced honestly and brought back to Hashem, it can uncover a depth of soul that an untested life never revealed.

This Shabbos Shuva, Hashem is not asking us to pretend that there was no night. He is asking us whether we are prepared to bring our night into the light—beginning in the hours that still remain and carrying that light through Havdalah into the year ahead.

קהלת יב:ז: וְהָיוּ תְּשׁוּבָה אֶל הָאֱלֹקִים אֲשֶׁר נִתְּנָה.

**The first Shabbos Shuva taught Adam that the night can shine like day. This Shabbos Shuva asks whether we are prepared to let it.**

## Primary Sources

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- Sanhedrin 38b — the hour-by-hour creation, command, sin, judgment, and mercy of Adam HaRishon on the sixth day.
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- Avodah Zarah 4b with Rashi — David and the Golden Calf as openings for individual and communal teshuvah.
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- Mishlei 5:16 and the Baal Shem Tov’s letter concerning “יפוצו מעיינותיך חוצה.”
- Rabbi Eliyahu Wolf, “הלילה המואר,” based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s Shabbos Shuva–Vayeilech 5738 teaching.