

BS"D

## Creative Teshuva

R. Mois Navon

Beit HaKenneset HaSefaradi BeRimon – Nitzavim 5780

---

**דברים פרשת נצבים פרק ל**  
**(ב) וְשָׁבַת עַד יִקְוֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ ...**

VeShavta. What is Teshuva?

According to R. Soloveitchik, teshuva is a creative act (maaseh yetzirati).

**R. Soloveitchik, Halakhic Man, p.110-117**

**Repentance, ...**, is an act of **creation** – self-creation.

But what is that supposed to mean? Isn't teshuva simply looking at past deeds and resolving to not do them anymore? What is creative about that?

To answer, we need to understand the deeper meaning of creativity. Accordingly, I ask your indulgence to take you through a small detour (maakaf) into the world of AI.

I was recently reading a book called "The Artist in the Machine" which discusses the possibility of machine creativity. That is, while we are all very aware of machines doing all kinds of tasks for us, they are largely computational. That said, AI engineers have been working together with artists, musicians, writers, in order to see if they can't get machines to create works of art.

It hasn't been easy, but the fact of the matter is that they have achieved some astounding results. For example, they can feed thousands of songs into a machine and tell it to produce a new song in that genre – and it does it. They can tell it to modify the song using some other parameters and it does it. The same goes for art and literature. There have been differing levels of success, but there is little doubt that in the not so distant future, machines will be considered creative.

This thought is quite unsettling for us humans because at the end of the day, when you really look closely at what makes special, what makes us unique, it is our creativity. Indeed, R. Soloveitchik speaks of two types of people: Species Man (Adam HaMin) and Man of God (Adam HaElokim).

**R. Soloveitchik, Halakhic Man, p. 123-128**

Man, in one respect, is a mere random example of the biological species – species man – an image of the universal, a shadow of true existence. In another respect he is a man of God, possessor of an individual existence. The difference between a man who is a mere random example of the biological species and a man of God is that the former is characterized by passivity, the latter by activity and creation. The man who belongs solely to the realm of the universal is passive to an extreme – he creates nothing. The man who has a particular existence of his own is not merely a passive, receptive creature but acts and creates. Action and creation are the true distinguishing marks of authentic existence.

האדם, מבחינה אחת, הוא דוגמא אקראית למין הביולוגי - אדם המין - דימוי של האוניברסלי, צל של קיום אמיתי. מבחינה אחרת הוא איש האלוקים, בעל קיום

אינדיבידואלי. ההבדל בין אדם שהוא דוגמה אקראית למין הביולוגי לבין איש האלוקים הוא בכך שהראשון מאופיין בפסיביות, האחרון בפעילות ויצירה. האיש ששייך אך ורק לתחום האוניברסלי הוא פסיבי באופן קיצוני - הוא לא יוצר דבר. האיש שיש לו קיום מסוים משל עצמו אינו יוצר פסיבי הרק מקבל אלא פועל ויוצר. פעולה ויצירה הם סימני ההבחנה האמיתיים של קיום אותנטי.

In short, species man just follows what the species does – eat, drink, sleep, etc.. Man of God, on the other hand, is, like God, creative. It is creativity that makes man unique, but it is a capacity we have in potential. We must strive to apply ourselves.

But then you will ask: Didn't we just say that machines can be creative? Doesn't that mean that we are not unique in this aspect of our being?

The answer is yes and no. Yes, machines are just as creative as people, and this definitely makes us question our uniqueness, our very worth as beings. But No, there is still something about our creativity which is of great worth: Us.

You see, if machines can create things just like we can, so our uniqueness cannot be in our creating those very things. In fact, if machines can do the work, they can do it more efficiently and, most likely, even better than humans. But we are not in competition with machines because human creativity is NOT about creating some THING but about BECOMING some ONE.

When I write a drash, it is not the same as if a computer had done it because when I write it, I CHANGE. You know, I could have fed all my drashot into a computer and said, write me a new drasha on teshuva. You know what, it could conceivably produce this very drasha – it knows I quote Soloveitchik, it knows I like to bring in computers or modern ideas, etc. So maybe my creativity is not expressed in the product – e.g., the drash – it is expressed in who I become in making the drash.

When a posek gives a psak, sure a computer could do it, but the posek is changed by it. The person receiving the psak is also affected differently than if a machine told him what to do. There is a relationship built between real conscious beings with depth and emotion. Similarly with personal relationships. Today, believe it or not, you can go and buy a robot and even get married to in some places! But what kind of a person do you become in such a relationship? Being married to a zombie, a golem, is no way to develop as a person.

So it is indeed our creativity that makes us unique. But we must realize that it is not the PRODUCT that we produce that is the goal of our creativity, but the PEOPLE we become that is the goal.

And that brings us back to teshuva and R. Soloveitchik. RSol writes on teshuva in Halachic Man:

Repentance, according to the halachic view, is an act of creation - self-creation. The severing of one's psychic identity with one's previous "I" and the creation of a new "I", possessor of a new consciousness, a new heart and spirit, different desires, longing, goals – this is the meaning of that repentance compounded of regret over the past and resolve for the future.

תשובה, על פי ההשקפה ההלכתית, היא מעשה של יצירה - יצירה עצמית.  
ניתוק הזהות הנפשית של האדם מה"אני" הקודם, ויצירתו של ה"אני"  
החדש, בעל תודעה חדשה, ולב ורוח חדשים, עם תשוקות, געגועים, ויעדים  
שונים - זו משמעות החזרה בתשובה...

To conclude: If our uniqueness is in our creativity, which is our ability to transform ourselves, then teshuva – as the concerted process of transforming ourselves – may be the clearest expression of that creativity.

May we merit to indeed transform ourselves for the better and thus merit the blessings of such as delineated in the parsha:

#### דברים פרשת נצבים פרק ל

(ב) וְשָׁבַתְּ עַד יְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֶיךָ ... (ג) וְשָׁב יְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת שְׁבוּתְךָ וְרַחֲמֶךָ ... (ה) וְהִבִּיאֲךָ  
יְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יָרְשׁוּ אֲבֹתֶיךָ וְיִרְשָׁתָּהּ וְהִיטִבָּךָ וְהִרְבָּךָ מֵאֲבֹתֶיךָ : ... (ז)  
וְנָתַן יְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת כָּל הָאֱלוֹת הָאֵלֶּה עַל אֵיבֶיךָ וְעַל שְׂנְאֵיךָ אֲשֶׁר רָדְפוּךָ : (ח) וְאָתָּה  
תָּשׁוּב וְשָׁמַעַתְּ בְּקוֹל יְקֹוֹק וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּךָ הַיּוֹם : (ט) וְהוֹתִירָךָ  
יְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדְךָ בְּפָרִי בְּטֹבָךָ וּבְפָרִי בְּהִמָּתְךָ וּבְפָרִי אֲדָמָתְךָ לְטֹבָה כִּי  
יָשׁוּב יְקֹוֹק לְשׁוֹשׁ עֲלֶיךָ לְטוֹב כִּי אֲשֶׁר שָׁשׂ עַל אֲבֹתֶיךָ : ... פ