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YOM KIPPUR 5772



REPENTANCE

*“For man is not righteous in the land
who does good and does not sin”.*

(Ecclesiastes 7:20)

By nature, we all err, and we all sin. It is inescapable. This explains why Yom Kippur is a yearly phenomenon. But God offers us Teshuva – repentance. We can quite literally erase all the evil we have performed and reestablish a relationship with God where he recalls nothing of our evil (*Ezekiel chap. 18*). Even with this one day, we can return to the truly good and happy life; ensuring our lives are not wasted, and protect our portion afterwards.

During these 10 Days of Repentance, Maimonides teaches that God readily accepts and forgives individuals. Although living for the next world causes us to miss both this and that world, we must not live as if there is no afterlife. We must wake up, end our denial of our immortality, and view the larger picture. God created us with intelligence precisely because it is when we engage it, that we find the greatest fulfillment. A Torah lifestyle offers tranquility and deep satisfaction. Its Mitzvos correct our morals, our actions, and our ideas. But this is only realized through practice.

Use these precious last few days to return to the proper path of Torah and the avoidance of sin. Recognize your errors, confess your sins and ask God to forgive. He will.

And reach out to those who are not observant. Use whatever means possible to bring them to a true understanding of God’s will, why we were created, and that genuine happiness is what our Creator desires for us through Torah.

May you be successful in your own Teshuva, and in assisting others in theirs...and may God seal each of us for good. Use these days and Yom Kippur wisely.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

**PLEASE PRAY FOR GERSHON DOV BEN CHAVA
THAT GOD SHOULD GRANT HIM A QUICK
AND COMPLETE RECOVERY.**



REPENTANCE

Rabbi Israel Chait

The famous philosopher Spinoza states: "Repentance is not a virtue, or does not arise from reason; but he who repents of an action is doubly wretched or infirm." Spinoza explains his statement further, by saying, "For the man allows himself to be overcome, first, by evil desires, secondly, by pain." Spinoza, contrary to popular opinion, had a shallow understanding of Torah. Repentance, as seen by the Torah, is the most vital institution man has in attaining perfection. It is based on a profound understanding of human nature. Repentance was an act of conscience, for Spinoza, an outburst of guilt over some sin, or evil act. This is no doubt true for the man-made religions which admonish man to let his conscience be his guide. The man-made religions are based on man's need to restrict his desires. Although man is filled with instinctual desire he finds he

is unhappy when he indulges himself in unrestricted fulfillment of these desires. He feels empty and worthless. He is thus caught between two needs, the need to satisfy his desires and the need to feel a sense of worthiness. Religion solves this dilemma by placing restrictions on his desires and even instilling pain at times. The Indian sun dance was a tortuous ceremony through which the dancer's flesh was torn away by skewers. The participant walked away with a feeling of being whole and cleansed. His conscience was satisfied. Modern man-made religions, although not as grotesque, are nevertheless based on this same struggle between man's desires and his conscience.

Torah, the religion given to us by God, is not based on these conflicting urges of the human soul. Indeed many

of the sins of the Torah make one feel very comfortable and are even satisfying to conscience. Idolatry, the Torah's worst sin, in which man uses some physical object to instill in himself fear of the Creator, does not evoke any sense of guilt. On the contrary, it makes one feel pious and God fearing. Yet the Torah states: you shall not make with me, gods of silver or gods of gold ..."(Exodus 20:20). The words, "with me" clearly indicate that even if these images are used to evoke a sense of the reality of God's existence they are idolatrous. The sin of the golden calf is an illustration of this point. Here the Israelites, in seeking a sense of security due to the absence of their leader Moses, created a physical object to reassure them of God's presence (see Exodus 32:1). The idea that the idolater is not in conflict with his conscience, is stated in Deuteronomy 29:18, "and he will feel blessed in his heart saying peace will be with me..."

Similarly, having mercy on a loved one who has strayed from Torah and causes others to sin does not carry with it pangs of conscience and yet is considered a sin. "You shall not have compassion and you shall not cover for him, but you shall surely kill him... because he has sought to draw you away from the Lord your God..."(Deuteronomy 13:9,10,11). Complete abstention from sexual intercourse does not seem abhorrent to conscience yet for the ben Israel is considered a most serious violation, a defiance of God's will. Ignorance and a lack of interest in Torah knowledge does not strike us as such a terrible thing yet it is one of the most serious crimes, one that is punishable by God not listening to one's prayers, as it says, "He who turns away his ear from hearing Torah, even his prayer is abomination." (Proverbs 28:9).

God's system of Torah is not based on practices that are satisfying to the human conscience. They are based on God's infinite knowledge and a very precise system that leads man to perfection, Torah. Here, man cannot use his feelings to navigate toward his destiny. He must employ the full powers of his mind in the study of God's works before he can have any knowledge of what is good and what is evil. No emotional attitude, conscience or otherwise, can give man this knowledge.

In the religion of knowledge, Torah, repentance plays a major role. Although man may have gained sight of the good he has not yet attained perfection. Man must incorporate the good in his soul and express it through his actions. This is no simple matter. Man's instinctual life (and with instinctual we include conscience) is very powerful, "for the impulse of man's heart is evil from his youth"(Genesis 8:21). The Rabbis annotate that the instinctual life begins at birth and controls man fully until puberty when the good inclination, man's ability to live according

to reason, starts to gain control. The instinctual life therefore has a head start, so to speak, and is forever lying in wait to distort man's judgements, as it says:"sin crouches at the door, and to you shall be its desire"(Genesis 4:7).

Given the dynamics of the human soul and the multifarious experiences of human life it is virtually impossible that man shall not at some time fall prey to some powerful emotion, distort his vision, and sin. The wise king, Solomon, expresses it in Ecclesiastes 7:20, "For there is not a just man upon earth that does good and sins not." When man sins he has not simply committed a violation. Man's nature demands that he have a good opinion of himself. He must thus distort the truth, change his value system and confuse evil for good in order to retain a sense of inner peace. Through sin man has become changed. He has abandoned a good and taken evil in its place. His ways are removed from God, the source of all truth. What is the remedy? Man has a remarkable ability: he can envision experiences in his mind without actually living through them. This ability can save him from his misfortune. Quietly, in the recesses of his mind, when the instinctual forces have abated, when experience, with its freshness and alluring qualities is gone, the individual can replay the scenes he has lived through. He can relive and re-examine situations, impulses, and decisions he has made in an impassioned state of mind. He can reconsider, alter change and improve on judgements and actions he has made at a previous time. Free from the distorting forces of emotion, he can study logically his deeds, and determine whether or not they are in error. If they are it is never too late to change them. While it is true that we cannot always undo the effects we caused in the external world, we may have to suffer their consequences, as the wise king states, "that which is crooked cannot be made straight..." (Ecclesiastes 1:15), this limitation does not apply to the internal life of man. He can undo the harm his soul has suffered by distortion of truth. He need only see things clearly, recognize his error and understand why his action can only cause himself harm. His realization must be so complete that were he in the same situation he would not act as he did before. His repentance is complete when he reaches this point. Repentance has converted the sinner from a man removed from truth and the ways of God to one who is even closer than he was before he had sinned. Realization of error is so powerful that he is even further removed from evil than before. Repentance is not an act of conscience; but a profound learning experience. It is accomplished through understanding and analysis of one's deeds, through logical introspection, and a careful examination of good and evil. The Torah does not construe repentance as a simple antidote for sin to be done on the occasion of transgression. It is a process that is constantly ongoing in the life of the righteous individual. It is an integral part of the growth

process of man. The Talmud states that if you have seen a righteous person commit a sin in the daytime you can be certain he repented by night. Repentance is a daily preoccupation of the righteous. Man must learn through experience but man cannot learn anything unless he can analyze his experiences. Sometimes we can analyze our actions before we act but at other times when we get too caught up, experience strikes at us too quickly and too forcefully. We are stunned and lose control of our abilities to think and judge properly. We give in to emotions of the moment and we fail. We can only do our analysis ex-post facto. But this does not stop us from engaging in a profound learning experience. On the contrary, if we muster up the courage to be honest with ourselves, to search for truth, we may make use of our failures and convert them into great successes.

Repentance offers man fresh insights, goads him on to search out truths of Torah, and gives him a sense of worthiness that is not based on hollow emotions of conscience but on living in line with God's reality. By not identifying the sense of guilt with sin, the Torah has removed the stigma from repentance and has raised it to the level of a proud and vital institution, the very cornerstone of human perfection. ■

JEW & GENTILE: EQUALS THE FAST DAY HAFTORA

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

God created one human pair: Adam and Eve. Noah and all others down to you and I descend from this couple. No one since Noah was created anew: no one possesses a different design or nature than any one else. Therefore, it is incorrect to suggest there exists different types of humans. Thus, Jew and gentile are identical in design. Where we differ is not in our design or potential, but in our Torah obligations.

The Haftora read on public fasts is Isaiah 55:6-56:8. A friend questioned this portion: "Isaiah appears to suggest that a gentile must observe the Sabbath. While we know Sabbath observance is prohibited for gentiles, how do we understand this?" This portion indicates that without Sabbath observance and following all of Torah, the gentile will not share in the future good to be granted to the Jew. Is this so? And if it is, why isn't the gentile obligated in all of Torah? Is God playing favorites with the Jew, purposely excluding gentile from living the greatest possible life? Let's review the text, and then offer an explanation:

Isaiah 55

"6. Seek God when He can be found; call Him when He is near. 7. Let the wicked person forsake his path and the man of sin [forsake] his thoughts and return to God and He will have mercy on him, [return] unto our God for He is abundant in forgiveness. 8. 'For My thoughts are not like your thoughts and your ways are not like My ways', says God. 9. As the heaven as are higher than the land, so are My ways higher than yours and My thoughts from your thoughts. 10. For as the rain and snow descend from the heavens and to there [heaven] they do not return; rather they moisten the land giving birth and sprouting, giving seed to the planter and food to eat. 11. So will be the word that leaves My mouth, it will no return to Me empty: for it will do that which I desire, and it will be successful where I sent it. 12. For in joy you will go out and in peace you will arrive; the mountains and valleys will break forth before you in song and the trees of the field will clap hands. 13. In the place of the thorn bush a cypress will rise; and in the place of the nettle a myrtle will rise and this will be a monument to God, an eternal sign never to cease.

Isaiah 56

1. Thus says God; observe justice and perform righteousness for My salvation is soon to come and My righteousness to be revealed. 2. Happy is the human who does this, and the son of Adam who seizes it; observing the Sabbath rather than profaning it and guarding his hand from doing all evil. 3. And let not the son of the stranger who attached himself to God say, 'God will surely separate me from His people and let not the barren one say 'Behold, I am a dry tree.' 4. For so says God to the barren who guard My Sabbaths and select which I desire and seize My covenant. 5. And I will give them a place and fame within My house and within My walls, better than sons and daughters and an eternal name I will give them that will never cease. 6. And the son of the stranger that attaches to God to serve Him and to love the name of God and to be to Him servants; all who observe the Sabbath instead of profaning it and seize My covenant. 7. And I will bring them to My holy mountain and I will gladden them in My house of prayer, their elevation offerings and peace offerings will find favor on My altar for My house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples. 8. The word of God, Who gathers the dispersed of Israel; 'I shall gather to him even more than those gathered to him.'"

Radak and others who understand the “*son of the stranger*” (56:3) to be Israelites, do not address here the distinction between Jew and Noahide. Rashi and Metsudas David understand “*son of the stranger*” to be the gentile. Following these two Rabbis let us understand these verses.

Isaiah's Message

We are first told to seek God when He is near and can be found. This is a call to Jews sinning in action and in thought, to return to God...to reestablish a relationship with Him. Repentance is thereby defined as not simply ceasing from sin, but reconnecting with God. The Rabbis teach that God is “found” only when we are earnest in our desire to draw close and do not practice Torah in a rote fashion. Alternatively, He is “found” during our judgment (on Rosh Hashanna or before death). For in these times, reality hits us most, we are genuine. God is also found (He responds) and we can repent, only during life, for we are taught that after life we cannot repent.

But man has a hurdle: he feels that perhaps his sins are not worthy of forgiveness. Therefore God tells us that His ways are different than man's ways. For man will at times guard his hatred for others and never forgive. We project this onto God, but wrongly. God assures us that He is far above our ways and He fully forgives, recalling nothing of our sins, if we are sincere. His promise is secure: as the rains and snow never return upwards, but successfully descend and water the Earth. So too, God's word is fulfilled, assuring us success in our repentance. Not only success, but also God says we become “an eternal sign never to cease.”

Isaiah then addresses gentiles. For they too have a chance at the same life as the Jew. A new address is made, “*Thus says God...(56:1)*” indicating the audience is now shifted from the previous Jews. God invites all to enjoy His “salvation” referring to the redemption. God clearly identifies this new audience of “humans” and “sons of Adam” to include all mankind. God teaches that true happiness is only achieved through the adherence to His entire system of 613 commands, termed as Sabbath and covenant.

While it is true that a Noahide is not permitted to observe the Sabbath without conversion, at the same time, his happiness and ultimate perfection relies on fulfilling all 613 commands. All will agree: with increased Torah observance comes increase perfection.

Jew and gentile are equal. Just as the wicked Jew must return, forsaking sinful acts and thoughts and adhere to the 613 to enjoy “an eternal sign never to cease,” so too a gentile is taught here to observe Sabbath and the covenant (i.e., all of Torah) if he too wishes the identical “*eternal name that will never cease (56:5)*.”

All Men are Created Equal

Isaiah exposes the same concern in the gentile as in the Jew: “*God will surely separate me from His people.*” Meaning, as Rashi states, the gentile feels he will not enjoy the reward of the Jew, “So why should I convert?” the gentile feels (*Rashi*). Therefore God corrects the gentile's false assumption as He corrected the Jews, promising the identical reward: “*And I will give them a place and fame within My house and within My walls, better than sons and daughters and an eternal name I will give them that will never cease.*”

God concludes, “*their [the gentile's] elevation offerings and peace offerings will find favor on My altar for My house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples. The word of God, Who gathers the dispersed of Israel; I shall gather to him even more than those gathered to him.*” God refers to His house as a house of “all people,” and further, He says he will gather to Him peoples, in addition to the Jews.

God created all members of mankind with identical souls and thus, identical potential. The only difference is that the Jew was not given the choice to observe the 613 commands, while the gentile has this option. As the gentiles' Noahide system is not a system of perfection, but an entitlement to his right to life, he must abide by a bare minimum of laws. But the 613 does not simply offer a right to life. Rather, it is a system of perfection.

The gentile has the opportunity that equals that of the Jew. Both Jew and gentile require actions to ensure their identical reward; the Jew must forsake sin and follow his obligation of 613 commands, and the gentile too can select this life. These are the two addresses in this portion.

As a final thought, why is the Sabbath singled out, if the entire 613 commands must be followed? This is because Sabbath recalls Creation, and it is Creation that bestowed equality on all men and women, who God created as descendants of a single couple. Isaiah's words underscore a theme of human equality throughout all of these verses.

As this portion is read on public fasts, its intent is to assist in repentance, so we learn of God's appreciation of the hurdles blocking man's repentance, and how He assists our return to Him by assuaging our concerns: the same concerns shared by Jew and gentile, and assuring our success.

God's “equation” here of the Jew and the gentile is evidenced not only in the identical rewards enjoyed by both, but also in the identical concerns for the hurdles towards repentance we both share, seeking to reestablish our relationship with God. ■

REPENTANCE

Rabbi Bernie Fox

“If a person violates any commandment of the Torah – a positive or a negative command – whether this violation is intentional or unintentional, when one performs repentance and repents from the sin, he is obligated to confess before G-d, Blessed Be He ... This confession is a positive command.” (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Repentance 1:1)

The period from Rosh HaShannah through Yom Kipur is devoted to the process of repentance. Each of us must attempt to engage in this fundamental process. What are we attempting to accomplish? What do we hope to achieve through this process?

Maimonides, in his Mishne Torah devotes ten chapters to the Laws of Repentance. The quote above is a portion of the first law in this section. Maimonides explains that the violation of any commandment engenders a requirement to perform teshuva – repentance. Whether we sin through commission or omission, whether the sin is intentional or unintentional, we are required to repent. This repentance must be followed by vedoi – a verbal confession of the sin and a commitment to change our behavior. Maimonides emphasizes the importance of this verbal declaration. He explains that this declaration is a positive commandment of the Torah.

In short, Maimonides teaches us that wrongdoing requires a twofold response. We must perform teshuva and vedoi. Vedoi is a verbalization of the process of teshuva. We put into words our regret for past behavior and our commitment to change.

Which of these two responses is more fundamental – teshuva or vedoi? We would imagine that teshuva is the more essential element. However, Maimonides seems to indicate that vedoi is the more fundamental component. He explains that the vedoi is a positive command.

Apparently, Maimonides maintains that repentance requires that a person address the Almighty and declare one’s contrition. Without the declaration, the process of repentance is incomplete. An unstated, internal sense of regret is inadequate. The repentant person must address Hashem and accept responsibility for his or her misdeeds.

This suggests that the process of teshuva is a prerequisite to vedoi. A person cannot make a meaningful declaration without an internal commitment. Therefore in order to perform vedoi, teshuva must occur. Maimonides con-

firms this interpretation of his comments in the next chapter of his discussion of repentance. There, he explains that one who performs vedoi without an internal commitment to change accomplishes little or nothing.[1]

“What is repentance? It requires that the sinner abandon the sin. And one must discontinue any contemplation of it. One must commit to not return to the behavior ... In addition, one must regret the past ... One should call upon Hashem as a witness that he will never return to the sin ... And one must declare these matters to which one has made an internal commitment.” (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Repentance 2:2)

Here, Maimonides describes in detail the process of repentance. He identifies five elements within the process. First, one must discontinue the sinful behavior. Second, one must refrain from even contemplating or fantasizing about the behavior. Third, the person must review past behaviors and feel sincere regret. Fourth, one must make a firm commitment to not return to the behavior. Maimonides then adds the person must verbalize these matters. This is the process of vedoi.

What is Maimonides telling us about teshuva and vedoi? Maimonides begins with a question. He asks, “What is teshuva?” The then responds. He explains that the verbal vedoi must follow the internal process. This is part of his description of teshuva. This strongly suggests that vedoi is part of the process of teshuva. It completes the process. How does vedoi complete the process? It seems that vedoi provides substance and finality to one’s commitment. Through expressing one’s thoughts in word, the person becomes more firmly committed to change.

It seems that Maimonides provides two different views on the role and significance of vedoi. In this chapter vedoi is characterized as a part of the teshuva process. It is the element that lends finality to the process. This is a very different characterization than that provided in the first chapter. That characterization is described above. In the first chapter, Maimonides explains that vedoi is the fundamental response to sin. Teshuva is a prerequisite to a meaningful vedoi. How can these two views be reconciled?

“One should not imagine that teshuva is limited to sins that involve some action – for example promiscuity, theft or larceny. Rather, just as one must repent from these, so one must seek out one’s improper attitudes and repent from them – for example from anger, hatred, jealousy ...” (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Repentance 7:3)

In order to answer our question, we must consider another apparent contradiction in Maimonides' treatment of repentance. We have discussed Maimonides' description of the process of repentance. Let us now consider his position regarding the type of behaviors that require repentance.

In the law quoted above Maimonides explains that the requirement to repent is not engendered solely by the violation of a commandment. We are also required to repent from improper attitudes or character traits. For example, we must attempt to abandon our hatreds and to temper and control our anger. We must evaluate all of our attitudes, identify our character flaws and address them. In other words, even if a person has not violated a specific commandment, teshuva is required.

This conclusion does not seem to agree with Maimonides' statement in the opening law of this section. In that law, Maimonides explains that teshuva and *vedoi* are required when a person violates a law of the Torah. This means that the violation of a commandment engenders the requirement to perform teshuva and *vedoi*. Some commission or omission must occur. This implies that poor attitude alone does not create an obligation to repent! How can these two positions be reconciled?

Let us return to our opening question. What are we attempting to accomplish through teshuva? What do we hope to achieve through this process? First, we must recognize that in sinning we violate the Torah. We disregarded the will of the Almighty. We rebel against the ultimate King. The *vedoi* that accompanies teshuva begins with the acknowledgment that we have sinned against the Torah. Through repentance, we attempt to earn atonement for this sin. We wish to avoid retribution or unpleasant consequences. In short, one objective of teshuva is atonement – *kapparah*. But does teshuva have any other objective?

“Since one is granted volition ... one should endeavor to perform teshuva and vedoi in response to sin ...” (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Repentance 7:1)

Maimonides does outline another objective in the process of teshuva. In order to identify this objective, we must consider the above quote. Maimonides explains that human beings are unique. We are endowed with freewill. We have the ability to choose between right and wrong. He explains that as a result of this faculty we are required to engage in teshuva.

Why does the element of human volition engender an obligation to perform Teshuva? Freewill means that we are in charge of our self-improvement. To a great extent, we determine the degree to which we fulfill our individual

potential. We decide whether we will squander our talents and lives or whether we will strive to fulfill our potential.

We can only achieve personal fulfillment through an ongoing process of teshuva. In this process we constantly reevaluate our lives and attitudes. We reconsider our personal mission and constantly seek self-improvement. The objective is not to atone but to purify – *tahara*.

In short, teshuva has two objectives. One objective is *kapparah* – atonement for our sins. The second objective is *tahara* – personal improvement.[2]

This explains Maimonides' position regarding which sins engender the obligation to perform teshuva. In the first chapter, Maimonides indicates that teshuva is a response to violation of the law. Maimonides is discussing the teshuva of *kapparah*. Atonement is required when the law is violated. If the law has not been violated, the obligation to seek *kapparah* is not engendered.

However, Maimonides teaches us that we should repent from improper attitudes and character traits. This is because in addition to *kapparah*, teshuva has a second objective. This objective is *tahara* – self-improvement. In order to achieve this objective, we must engage in an ongoing process of introspection. This process requires that we consider and evaluate our attitudes and character traits.

We can now explain Maimonides' treatment of *vedoi*. In the first chapter of the Law of Repentance, Maimonides is explaining the process of atonement. In this process the *vedoi* is the fundamental element. We have sinned against Hashem's Torah. It is appropriate to verbally appeal to Hashem for forgiveness and atonement. Accordingly, *vedoi* is fundamental to achieving atonement. In this context, the *vedoi* is not merely the final step in teshuva. It is the essential element in the process of *kapparah*.

However, teshuva is not merely a prerequisite in the process of achieving atonement. It is also a process that purifies and improves a person. In this process, the internal element is essential. Self-improvement requires thorough introspection. In the second chapter of the Laws of Repentance, Maimonides is explaining the process of teshuva. He describes it as a process of self-improvement. Its objective is internal change. In this context, *vedoi* completes and teshuva. It finalizes the internal commitments that result from the process of introspection. Therefore, in this context Maimonides describes *vedoi* as the final element in the process of teshuva. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Teshuva 2:3.

[2] See Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Al HaTeshuva (Jerusalem, 5739), Part 1.

TESHUVA: MORE THAN A COMMANDMENT

Rabbi Ruben Gober

After discussing the commandment for repentance in the beginning of his Laws of Repentance, the Rambam says in chapter 7, law 1: "Since control over himself is given to each individual as we explained [in the previous chapters the Rambam discussed how every individual has free will] a person should try to do repentance and confess with his mouth his sins, and shake from his hands his sins, so that he should die as a Ba'al Teshuva (one who repented) and merit the world to come." There are a few questions that can be asked on this statement of the Rambam, but it seems that there is one basic problem: What is the Rambam trying to teach us here? We already know that there is a commandment to repent so what does he mean that since a person has free will, he should repent - what does this add?

Furthermore, the last part of the law is quite puzzling: "...so he should merit the world to come" Does the Rambam mean that we should perform this obligation as a means to achieve the reward of the world to come? From a simple reading of the text, it would seem so. However, a problem arises when we read in Chapter 10 Law 1: "One should not say 'I will perform commandments of the Torah and be involved in its wisdom so that I will receive the blessings written in it or so that I will merit live in the world to come'...it is not appropriate to serve God in this way..." and again in the same chapter, Law 4: "...maybe one will say 'I will learn Torah so that...I will receive a share in the world to come'- we are taught saying 'to love God'- anything you do should be from love." It is clear that the Rambam discourages any motivation for performing commandments other than the love of God. If so, how could the Rambam encourage a person to fulfill the commandment to repent with the motivation of receiving reward in the world to come?

To understand what the Rambam is trying to teach us, let us examine his original statement more closely. The Rambam says that since a person has free will, he should repent. What is the connection between the concept of free will and the concept of repentance? And why does the Rambam mention this only now in chapter 7 and not in the beginning chapter when he introduces the commandment to repent?

Many times we find that when people think about their own actions and behaviors, whether they be sins or just

everyday habits, people believe that these actions stem from a part of them which is permanently engrained inside themselves, almost as if there is some force within them that causes them to do these actions, and, therefore, they must do it. They feel that they don't have any control over these actions; it's simply a part of who they are and that it is something they cannot change. They don't sincerely desire to change since a part of them feels that there is nothing they can do about it. The notion of free will, however, directly opposes this type of perspective in that it means that there is something within man that can allow him to act in whichever way he deems good and correct. The concept of free will shows us that man is the final, ultimate arbiter of how he lives his life so that if, for example, man desires to change, he has that ability.

With this idea, we can understand the connection between free will and repentance, but we are still left with our previous questions about the end of the statement: "so that he dies as one who repented and can merit the world to come." What does the Rambam mean? Why is he suddenly shifting to death and the world to come? And why isn't the fact that we have a commandment to repent a sufficient motive?

Once man understands the concept of free will and its import, namely that he has the ability to choose the life that he wants to live, it naturally follows that man is obligated to think through what he wants to do with his life. Of course, this demands an analysis of what the value and function of his life is. Every decision we make reflects what we think is valuable and want to pursue in life. When we think about the fact that we can choose what we want, we need to consider what man is, what the nature of our existence is, in order to choose what is best for us.

It is in this context that the phenomena of death and the world to come are relevant to one's personal concerns and values. Most people look at their existence and only take into account one ingredient of their makeup, that which they can sense and feel- the physical element. But when one thinks about the fact that death is inevitable, it places the physical world in a certain perspective. The inevitability of death shows man that the physical world does not partake of 'real existence' in that eventually it must end; it won't last forever. So what is a 'real existence' that will last? When we look at man, we notice another component of his makeup, the soul. This is the aspect of man which he uses to think, to conceptualize, to appreciate the wisdom of God, and to delineate between good and evil. The Torah calls this aspect of man the 'Tzelem Elokim', image/reflection of God, which the commentators explain to be the intellectual capacity to reflect on the non-physical (see Sforno on Genesis 1:27). That being the case, there is a

way man can have a 'real' lasting existence- by partaking of the non-physical and developing the non-physical tool that God granted him, the soul. How does it last forever? That is 'Olam Haba', the world to come where the soul of man continues to exist after the physical part of man, his body, is gone.

This perspective is clearly expressed in Tractate Avot, Chapter 4 Mishna 16: "Rabbi Yaakov said 'This world is like a vestibule to the World to Come- prepare yourself in the vestibule so that you may enter the reception room.'" Here too, one should not think that the Mishna is teaching one to serve God in order to obtain reward (that is contrary to what the mishna previously taught in Chapter 1, Mishna 3); rather the mishna is teaching a perspective, how one should look at his existence in this world. When one sees that the physical world around him is limited and that only the non-physical part of him will continue to exist, he is forced to look at his existence here as a temporal means of preparing oneself for the next life. With that perspective, a person will look at physical enjoyments and relate to them differently, in effect changing his view of reality and bringing about internal as well as behavioral changes in the person.

With these concepts in mind, we can now explain what the Rambam is trying to teach us. When one realizes that he is not under the uncontrollable sway of any internal 'forces' but rather has the ability to choose a life of value and meaning, one is forced to evaluate what is valuable and worth pursuing. In this study, man must reflect on the nature of this worldly existence- it is limited and temporal. That being the case, man must realize that the only real and valuable existence is one in which he lives in line with his soul so that his soul is developed and perfected so that it is able to exist beyond this physical world after death. This is what Rambam means: do repentance so that when one dies, one will have merited a place in the world to come. The Rambam doesn't mean that one should repent for a greater reward. That would be giving us a false motivation, as he says later in Chapter 10. Rather, he is teaching us to view repentance with the correct perspective of reality: that one should realize what is real and what is temporary and adjust his mentality and behavior accordingly, just as the Mishna in Avot taught. In this perspective, the World to Come is not a reward one should sacrifice for - it is the only value one has, even in this world, just as the value of the vestibule is in its ability to prepare for the reception. Thus, in this statement, the Rambam teaches us the idea that repentance is more than just a command by God - it is the natural response man has when he is honest with himself who he is, and what is a truly meaningful existence. ■

THE CONCEPT OF TESHUVA

Rabbi Joshua Maroof

*"Take words with you, and return to Hashem..."
(Hosea 14:3)*

As we approach the High Holidays each year, the theme of self-improvement becomes one of the focal points of our thought. We are strongly encouraged to involve ourselves in the process of teshuva, or repentance, in preparation for the upcoming Days of Awe. The Jewish notion of repentance, however, is by no means simple or self-evident. What exactly is teshuva, and how does one go about doing it? The Torah provides precise guidelines for the fulfillment of all of its commandments; thus, if we intend to observe the commandments correctly, it is incumbent upon us to consult these guidelines as a matter of course. The commandment to repent of our sins is no exception to this rule - it encompasses a host of halakhot and principles that are indispensable to its proper performance. Therefore, before we can repent in a halakhically meaningful way, we must take up the study of the Torah's unique approach to teshuva.

The Rambam's Introduction - The Mitzvah of Teshuva

Without question, if we wish to develop a better understanding of the subject of repentance, we must turn to the Mishneh Torah of the Rambam. The Rambam was the first of our Sages to provide us with a systematic and comprehensive treatment of the topic of teshuva, and his accomplishment in this area remains unequaled to this day. Careful attention to the Rambam's formulation of the Laws of Repentance is sure to reward us with valuable insight into their deeper significance. As an introduction to these laws, the Rambam writes:

"This section contains one positive commandment, namely, that the sinner should repent before Hashem and confess."

This brief statement raises a powerful question: what sense does it make for the Torah to institute a commandment to repent? If a person who has transgressed one of the laws of the Torah subsequently decides to repent, he will simply go back to keeping the original commandment he violated. He does not need to be commanded to heed a commandment that already exists! If, on the other hand, he has not yet resolved to abandon his sin, there is no reason to think that an additional commandment will help him. He can choose to neglect the commandment to repent just like he opted to neglect the mitzvah he has already violated!

Additionally interesting is the fact that the Rambam uses an apparently superfluous phrase to describe repentance, calling it repentance before Hashem. Of course, the Rambam is not alone in using this kind of terminology. The Tanach often refers to repentance as returning to Hashem. Nevertheless, this concept is very difficult to comprehend. When a person repents, it appears that he is attempting to return to the observance of a particular commandment, not to Hashem! The association of teshuvah with standing before Hashem does not seem like an accurate depiction of what occurs in real repentance where one's conduct, rather than one's God, is the center of focus. Simply put, how is the notion of being in the presence of God relevant to the process of repentance?

Repentance and Confession

As our investigation of the Rambam's teachings progresses, further difficulties begin to emerge. The first chapter of the Laws of Repentance commences with these words:

All of the commandments of the Torah, whether positive or negative - if a person should violate one of them, whether willfully or inadvertently - when he repents and turns away from his sin, he is obligated to confess before God, Blessed is He, as it is written: "A man or a woman, when they do any sin...and they shall confess the sin that they did." This refers to verbal confession. This confession is a positive commandment. How does one confess? He says: "Please Hashem! I have erred, sinned, and rebelled before you, and I have done such-and-such. Now I am regretful and embarrassed by my behavior and I will never return to this thing again." This is the essential confession. And anyone who makes a more lengthy confession and elaborates on this topic is praiseworthy.

The first feature of this passage that requires some explanation is the repetitive clause "when he repents and turns away from his sin." Isn't repentance and turning away from sin the same thing? The Rambam appears to be repeating himself unnecessarily here.

The concept of viduy, or confession, is also difficult to understand. Ostensibly, in requiring us to repent, the Torah's primary objective is that we stop behaving in ways that violate its laws. One can certainly make a firm decision to change one's behavior for the better without verbalizing it; in the end, it is what a person does that should matter, not what a person says. Yet, it is clear that the Torah sees confession as indispensable to teshuva. The Rambam reflects this by counting teshuva and viduy as a single, unitary commandment as well as by mentioning repentance and confession together throughout his treat-

ment of the subject. Hence, we must ask, what benefit do we gain by translating our repentance into words? How does this make our teshuva more complete?

Additionally problematic is the Rambam's recommendation that the sinner elaborate on his confession as much as possible. What room is there for elaboration in a viduy? Seemingly, once the sin has been identified, remorse has been expressed, and a resolution to change has been adopted, there is nothing left to say. Whether one's confession is long or short, what we are most interested in is whether the sinner discontinues his inappropriate behavior. There should be no room for differences in degree - either a person has abandoned his error, or he has not.

Defining Teshuva

In order to resolve these difficulties, we must examine the concepts of sin and teshuva more carefully. Specifically, we must consider the fact that a person who violates one of the commandments is doing a lot more than acting inappropriately. His sin is not a random occurrence that can be viewed separately from his personal beliefs and convictions. On the contrary, through his action he is demonstrating something about his entire value system: he is making a statement about what he envisions - or does not envision - as his purpose in life. An example will better illustrate this point. The Torah demands that we restrict ourselves to the consumption of kosher food. Eating kosher is instrumental to our development as human beings because it keeps us aware of our spiritual objective in life even as we are involved in taking care of our physical needs. Observance of kashrut demonstrates our belief that eating cannot be significant in its own right unless it is a means to our ultimate goal - the service of our Creator. Hence, an individual who succumbs to temptation and consumes non-kosher food has not simply committed a technical violation of Torah law. He has indicated through his action that he is not fully dedicated to the philosophical principles of Judaism. He has not adopted an unequivocal set of life priorities - he is torn between the lure of instinctual gratification for its own sake and his desire to develop his mind and soul. In a moment of weakness, his baser drives grabbed hold of him and overpowered his intellect, leading him to neglect an important commandment. The violation itself, however, was only a symptom of a more basic conflict within his personality.

When we become aware that we have committed a sin, then, this should serve as a stimulus to deeper reflection on the purpose of our existence. We should not write it off as a fluke but should perceive it as a sign that we have moved too far in the wrong direction philosophically, that we have not sufficiently clarified our ultimate priorities in life. We should realize that our action indicates that we are ambivalent about some aspects of the Torah's values and directives, and that, as a result, we still struggle with

them in practice. This in turn should motivate us to immerse ourselves in Torah study in order to gain a clearer sense of the purpose of our existence and to increase our awareness of how important its teachings and mitzvot are for our development. We will emerge from this quest with a more definitive set of principles and priorities to guide our lives - and, as a natural result, we will feel compelled to abandon our misguided ways. This, in fact, is the reason why the Rambam uses the double language “when a person repents and turns from his sin” when he introduces the mitzvah of doing teshuva. It is the internal, transformational process of self-reflection, value clarification and study that constitutes true teshuva - the behavior change is, as it were, a by-product of this monumental effort.

Teshuva - A Unique Commandment

Now we are in a better position to understand why repentance must be counted as an independent commandment. It is not equivalent to simply resuming the observance of the mitzvah that has been neglected. Even if the Torah had not included a mitzvah to repent, a person who ate non-kosher food would be expected to return to a kosher diet as soon as possible in order to avoid further violations of the formal laws of kashrut. This change in behavior alone would be expected as a function of the original commandments to keep kosher, with or without an additional commandment to repent. This change in behavior, however, would not constitute real teshuva. The commandment to do teshuva requires a complex set of operations that transcend the realm of behavior and focus on the values and beliefs of the sinner. When we commit a transgression, we are obligated to delve into our personal convictions and correct the philosophical error(s) that led to the sin. We are commanded to refine our understanding of our purpose in life and the choices we must make if we are to achieve that purpose. Although the person who decides to resume his observance of kashrut will do his best to avoid future kashrut infractions, he will still be required - as a function of his past violations - to engage in the more introspective process of teshuvah at some point in time. By introducing a separate mitzvah of teshuvah, the Torah teaches us that we have not fully repented for our transgressions until we have taken the time to explore the depth of their significance. Superficial changes in our habits are not enough to satisfy the Torah's requirement of teshuva.

The Role of Confession

The new insights we have developed can also help us to explain why confession is such a central feature of repentance. Human speech is a reflection of the ability of human beings to think conceptually. Indeed, from the way an individual communicates an idea it is easy to measure the coherence and precision of his understanding. When a person cannot put what he is thinking into words, we tend

to assume that his musings are not yet developed enough to be expressed in speech. Said simply, the use of language is intimately related to the use of the mind. If teshuva were synonymous with bettering our actions, confession would have no intrinsic relationship to it. Repentance would be a matter of the body while confession would be a matter of the soul. One would theoretically be possible without the other. However, now that we see that teshuva is, in reality, a process of thought and analysis, it follows that - if we have truly completed the process - we should be able to summarize our conclusions in a final declarative statement. At the culminating point of our introspection, we are challenged to demonstrate the clarity of our newfound convictions by expressing them verbally. If we cannot rise to the challenge, our repentance is by no means complete - our thought is not yet clear enough to be articulated. We must continue to seek a better understanding of our personal issues until we have a firm grasp on them, until we can use language to describe them. By the same token, when we have made real progress in our soul-searching, our confession would be expected to mirror the profundity and complexity of our self-analysis. This is why the Rambam states that a confession has the potential for a great deal of expansion and elaboration. The more thoroughly we have delved into the significance of our transgressions and the examination of our life priorities, the richer and more descriptive our confessions will be.

Returning “Before Hashem”

At this stage it becomes clear why doing teshuva is always described as returning to, or before, Hashem. It is true that the immediate stimulus to repentance is usually a specific violation of Torah law that occurs at a particular time in a particular place. However, the process of repentance moves beyond the superficial features of a transgression to an analysis of its underlying causes and a reflection on the ultimate purpose of our lives. Teshuva culminates not merely in the rejection of incorrect values but in the sinner's rededication to the highest human priority - the quest for knowledge of Hashem. As a result of his soul-searching, the penitent's awareness of his true position in the Universe has deepened tremendously; thus, he now stands in the presence of Hashem, humbly refocused on the meaning of his own existence. ■

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ZECHUS AND AVON

Matt Schneeweiss

Rambam begins his discourse on Hashem's din (judgment) with the following statement:

“Each and every person has zechiyos and avonos. A person whose zechiyos are greater than his avonos is a tzadik, and one whose avonos are greater than his zechiyos is a rasha. A person who has equal zechiyos and avonos is a beinoni (middle-person) . . . The weighing [of zechiyos and avonos] does not go according to their quantity, but according to their magnitude: a zechus might be equal to many avonos . . . and an avon might be equal to many zechiyos . . . This weighing can only be done in the ‘Mind’ of the El Deios (God of Virtues and Vices); He is the [only] One Who knows how to evaluate the zechiyos against the avonos” (Hilchos Teshuvah 3:1).

In order to understand this on even a basic level, we must answer one fundamental question: according to Rambam, what are *zechiyos* and *avonos*? It is tempting to answer this question simply by translating the Hebrew into English terms, such as “merits” and “iniquities.” Nevertheless, even the most accurate translation is no substitute for a meaningful definition. Unless we know exactly what Rambam means by these terms, then our translations will serve as nothing more than smokescreens for our ignorance, and we will not learn what Rambam is trying to teach us.

The answer to our question can be found in the seventh chapter of Rambam's *Shemoneh Perakim*, in his explanation of an allegory used by Chazal. The allegory states that the different prophets would “see” (i.e. know) Hashem through many “veils.” Some saw Him through fewer veils and some saw Him through more – each in accordance with his or her level of prophecy. Moshe Rabbeinu, who reached the highest level of prophecy, succeeded in removing all veils except for a single, “transparent” veil. In other words, his apprehension of Hashem was almost completely unobscured.

Rambam extends this allegory from prophets and their prophetic knowledge of God to ALL people and knowledge of reality in general. He explains that each of us “sees” reality through a many “veils.” These “veils” are human imperfections. These imperfections fall into two categories: imperfections of character (such as anger, arrogance, jealousy, greed, etc.) and imperfections of intellect (such as foolishness, naïveté, weakness of comprehension, intellectual dishonesty, etc.).

It is here where the Rambam explicitly answers our question. He writes: *“All these imperfections are the veils that separate between man and God. This was alluded to in the prophet's statement, ‘It is your avonos that separate between you and your God’ (Yishaya 59:2). ‘Your avonos’ - namely, the aforementioned imperfections, are the veils that separate between us and Him.”* In other words, according to the Rambam, *avonos* are the imperfections of intellect and character which obscure and distort our perception of reality and our knowledge of God. From this we may infer the corresponding definition of *zechiyos*: *zechiyos* are the virtues of intellect and character which illuminate and clarify our apprehension of reality and our knowledge of God.

With these definitions, we can now “demystify” the notion that *mitzvos* result in *zechiyot* and *aveiros* result in *avonos*: every *mitzvah* results in a *zechus* (an improvement in either intellect or character) and every *aveirah* results in an *avon* (a worsening of intellect or character).

Moreover, we can now understand why Hashem is the only One Who is capable of “weighing” our *zechiyos* and *avonos*. As human beings, our capacity for self-knowledge is limited. Although we can know ourselves to some degree, it is humanly impossible for us to know the extent to which a particular *avon* will cloud our apprehension of reality, and what effect that obfuscation will have on our subsequent life. Likewise, it is humanly impossible for us to know the impact of a particular *zechus* on our clarity of apprehension, and how that clarity will benefit us in the future. Hashem is the only One Who can make this evaluation. For this reason, the only realistic way to view oneself is as a *beinoni*.

Now that we have a clear understanding of *zechus* and *avon*, I'd like to express my wish that we all be *zocheh* (i.e. to improve our intellects and character, and thus, our knowledge of reality in order) to merit a *shanah tovah* and a *geulah shleimah* (complete redemption), for each of us as individuals, and for all of *Klal Yisrael!* ■

