HILKHOT TESHUBA: 1:1. The ultimate regret

In his monumental book, Mishne Tora, Maimonides dedicates ten chapters to the subject of Teshuba (repentance). In those chapters he describes and explains the technical issues involved in the process of repentance. He also deals in length with the idea of freedom of choice and how it relates to Teshuba. In the eighth Chapter he clarifies the Jewish view on the afterlife (‘olam-habba) and in the last chapter he elaborates on the proper way to serve God: if we should serve God expecting a reward or out of our unconditional love for Him.
In this month, Elul, B’H I will try to cover some of these important issues.
Hilkhot Teshuba 1: 1:
“All the commandments of the Tora, when a person transgress a prohibition or when he *fails to perform a positive commandment*… when he regrets….”.
Normally, we think of Teshuba/repentance as regretting our mistakes, flaws, misdeeds, etc. But according to Maimonides’ statement we also, or primarily, need to regret what we have *not*done. We are accountable not just for our actions but also for our inaction and idleness. For not doing all the good and right things we should have done.
Many times, when I’ve visited in the Hospital patients who knew they will die soon (and they were conscious) I’ve seen that they do not focus their regret on the mistakes they might have made. Rather, at those most sacred last moments, when their whole life lies in front of them and there is not more time to change anything, invariably, I found out, people regret the good things they should have done and they didn’t do. The many opportunities they’ve missed to make a change. Big or small. At these moments, when they realize more than ever the preciousness of time, they regret to have waisted so much of it in material-fruitless efforts instead of giving more, helping more, fighting for what is right and getting

closer to God. People regret they have missed their full potential. The greater the person or the highest position or the power that person had, the bigger the feeling of frustration for having missed so many opportunities to impact positively his own life and the life of others.
Following this simple idea, Teshuba implies, first of all, the realization of our talents. Taking charge and being responsible for maximizing our potential to make a change, to give, to inspire and to come closer to God.

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How much life are you choosing?