Repentance and the human condition

In his formidable book Menorat HaMaor, Rabbi Isaac Abohab (14th century, the exact date of his birth and death is unknown) presents in his Fifth Section (volume 2, page 663 of the Nefesh Yehuda edition), the Mitzvah of Teshuba, repentance.

First, Rabbi Abohab explains that according to our rabbis the idea of □□repentance is essential for the existence and continuity of humanity, both on the Divine and on the social realm. This is based on the notion that man, by nature, is fallible. We were endowed by God with free will, and we can not avoid to err. Sometimes we act wrong. Sometimes we lie. Sometimes we harm another person, unintentionally or even intentionally. If the possibility of repentance would not exist, if every wrong action we take will irreversibly lead to its consequences, life would be unsustainable.

Let us think of what would happen, in the dimension of our relationship with the Creator, if every time we commit sin to Him we will be immediately punished or condemned to disappear; if there were no possibility of repentance between a transgression and its punishment. If every time we err we will be automatically punished, we would behave like robots, and it would be impossible to keep our free will (choosing to do right or wrong), which is essential for our spiritual growth and to our relationship with God. Teshuba is a space / time for reflection that HaShem allows between the mistake committed and the punishment that we deserve for that mistake. A time we should utilize to admit our error, repent and amend our actions.

Something very similar, and easier to understand, happens in the social realm. Imagine a society with no forgiveness. A

society in which every wrongdoing means the irreversible rupture of our relationship with another person. Imagine the absence of Teshuba / forgiveness between parents and children; husband and wife; friends, colleagues, etc. Life, as we know it, would be unsustainable. The potentiality of *repentance* creates the possibility of *forgiveness* among human beings. Of course, as Rabbi Abohab will later explain, "forgiveness", both on the divine and human planes, is conditioned by the seriousness of the error committed: there are forgivable faults, and faults that are irreversible. Damages to there people done involuntary and others made with premeditation, etc.

Rabbi Abohab, quoting a famous Midrash, says that Teshuba is a foundational element in human society. That Midrash says that the Creator □□□□ □□□ □□□ ,□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□, "He conceived in His thought worlds without Teshuba and those worlds were not sustainable." Then He create our world, with the possibility of Teshuba.

Something more about this profound idea of □□Rabbi Abohab.

When the Midrash says that "the world" would not be sustainable without Teshuba it is not referring to the "natural" world; it refers exclusively to human civilization. In fact, in the dimension of nature, say in the animal kingdom, there is no Teshuba. Nonhuman creatures can not choose to act in a "good" or "evil" way, the act necessarily by instinct. Animals can deceive, guided by their instinct to hunt or survive, but they can not lie with full conscience or premeditation. When there is no free will, the concept of Teshuba does not fit. In the "natural" world there is no reversibility. Nature is governed by the laws of cause and effect. There is no room for reflection between action and consequence. A tumor does not regret its growth. And once Socrates drinks the hemlock, the repentance of his executors cannot stop the effects of the poison, the venom follows its "natural" course. Only in a world with consciousness, i.e.,

the human world, there is a possibility of reflection and repentance.

All this should help us to understand (and appreciatte!) less superficially what Teshuba is. Same as free will and consciousness, the possibility of correcting what we did wrong is a “supernatural” factor, a gift, from our Creator.