3. Regret and security cameras

In his book Menorat haMaor Rabbi Isaac Abohab lists The Seven Levels of Teshuba. That is, the different circumstances in which, or for which, a person regrets the wrong actions he or she did. These levels are classified according to certain categories. For example: 1. At what point do you realize that you have done something wrong and you stop doing it? 2. The alertness or numbness of your conscience. 3. If the repentance took place before or after you suffered the consequences of what you did wrong, etc.

The highest level of Teshuba is when one repents by himself, immediately, and before having been negative consequences of his bad actions.

A second level is when one does NOT immediately realize what he did wrong, and keeps repeating his wrongdoings until it becomes a habit but later repents because of a positive external stimulus, for example, the Selichot, the Viduy, the Shofar, or after studying or listening to words or Tora.

The third level, which we will see today, is when one repents once he can no longer repeat his wrongdoing.

Examples:

1. A supermarket employee steals merchandise and takes it home without anyone seeing it. As he does not immediately regret it, this action persists for a time and becomes a habit that the employee perfects to avoid being caught. His conscience no longer “protests” against this wrongdoing. Now, his imagination helps the mind to prevent awakening the conscience. How? By make up imaginary excuses: “The owners are very rich.” “They are not affected at all by what I take away.” “They

don’t pay me enough.” “I work more than the other employees ”. “I deserve to get paid more and it has been a long time since they increased my salary”, etc, etc. These rationalizations numb a healthy feeling of guilt. The stealing continues and regret is not in sight. But one day, the employee comes to work and, oh surprise!: The owners have installed security cameras in the supermarket. The circumstances are different now. He can no longer steal without being seen. The brain stops inventing justifications. And ironically, this allows him to realize that he did something wrong and he finally regrets it. Rabbi Abohab indicates that although this individual’s behavior changed because circumstances changed –he no longer has the opportunity to steal as before– this “repentance”, although imperfect, is considered by the Tora as valid.

2. A man travels abroad on business. And there, where nobody knows him, he lets himself to be carried away by temptation and proceeds in a wrong way in the sexual area. Then, back home, he regrets what he did. In his town, where everyone knows him, he can no longer repeat his wrongdoing. And somehow, as Maimonides says, **regret is credible when someone repents while in a position to repeat the same mistake** but now chooses not to do so thanks to a better understanding of what infidelity means, etc. Either way, says Rabbi Abohab, although this act of repentance occurs when one no longer has the possibility of repeating the previous error, this act of contrition is valid, and his Teshuba, although not perfect, is accepted by God.
3. For many years an individual is in a very comfortable financial situation. Some people in need approach him to ask for help, but he constantly says “NO” and refuses to help others. As time goes by, this individual persists in his selfish behavior and does not realize (or does not want to realize) that what he is doing is wrong. Every year during the month of Elul, Rosh haShana, and

> Yom Kippur, he recites the Selichot, listens to the Shofar, and learns about the importance of giving Tsedaqa, but nothing has an effect on him. After a few years, his businesses go bad and he loses a large part of his assets. He has no money to spare but ironically, now that he can no longer help, he regrets not having helped others when he could. This repentance, says Rabbi Abohab, while not ideal, is valid and accepted by the Creator.

The Sages explain that if we repent while the opportunity for further wrongdoing still exists, the highest level of Teshuba is reached.

But they also said that the doors of the Teshuba are never closed. And HaShem is always willing to accept our repentance, even if it is not perfect.