Regret and suffering

We are analyzing the Seven Levels of Teshuba, repentance, formulated by Rabbi Abohab in his book Menorat haMaor.

The fifth level mentioned by Rabbi Abohab is when one repents after having the bad experienced the consequences of his or her wrongdoings, or after having suffered difficulties. These difficulties are not necessarily related to our wrong behavior. Let's see.

The negative experiences that we live –for example a health problem or economic difficulties– are seen by our Sages as experiences that can potentially transform us; making us more humble and wiser. Negative experiences can inspire us and push us to reestablish our relationship with the Creator.

There is a very famous paragraph in the Torah, in the book of Debarim (Deuteronomy) chapter 30, verse 4 that refers to the collective Teshuba, to the repentance of the people of Israel when their exile ends. The Tora says: *"And at the end of days, when you have lived in the midst of all these [sufferings and persecutions], you will return to HaShem your God and obey his voice."* This biblical text asserts that repentance comes as a consequence of having suffered pain, persecution and death, in this case in the hands of the nations in which we were exiled.

This type of Teshuba, maturing after suffering, is not the ideal Teshuba, since it is not born from a deep conscience introspection, but from external factors that are not in our hands, but I believe that it is the most frequent reason a process of repentance begins. For example, a Jewish person who does not live a life of observance sometimes begins to assume his or her Jewish identity when she suffers the contempt, hatred or ridicule of the anti-Semite.

It also happens that many Jews grow closer to God and Tora, for example, after having lost a loved one. When an individual

loses a family member, first he rebel and depending on the circumstances, sometimes people “get angry” at the Almighty. But then, as one progresses through the stages of mourning, one becomes closer to acceptance and is reconciled with the Creator. This reconciliation can take the individual to a spiritual level higher than before. A relationship with God that is closer now than it was before suffering his loss.

Suffering is sometimes the only way to mature, grow, understand and value. When we lack nothing and we have plenty of resources and health to enjoy a comfortable material quality of life, we can easily forget God, and without planning it, we suffocate our spiritual life. We mistakenly act as if God is there to ask him for what I need…. And it doesn’t even occur to us to thank Him for giving us everything we have.

Every month, the father sent money to his son who was studying abroad. The father called the son very often, but the son never had time to talk to him. It never occurred to him to call his father and he never thank him for helping him and supporting him financially. So the father decided not to send more money. At first the son said nothing, but after two months, when his money ran out, he called his father. “Hi dad, how are you doing? I miss you! We haven’t talked for a while…. Oh! By the way, you haven’t sent me money for two months, did you forget about me? ” The generous father, who did not forget his son, was forced to interrupt his generous gifts and have his son go through some hardships so that he could appreciate all his father was doing for him.

Rabbi Abohab explains that unfortunately many human beings (probably most of us) remember God only when we need him, we always call him to ask Him and almost never to thank him. And it is possible that, as in the example of the father and son, God’s last resort to get our attention and to push us to communicate with Him, is to interrupt the blessings that He gives us and that we take for granted: our health, our

tranquility, our prosperity.

From this point of view, says Rabbi Abohab, negative experiences and suffering should always motivate us to reconnect with Him and get closer to Him .