6. Repentance After Being Caught

Regret, no matter how late happens, always has some value. We are not referring to repentance for offenses or damages that we may have caused to other people, but rather to repentance for what we did wrong in the area of □□religious or moral values; in our relationship with God. If we abandon Judaism, for example, or if we have transgressed the principles of the Tora, or if we have turned away from God, etc.

In these cases, late regret, even if not ideal, is still positive. Consider a Jewish person who lived his or her entire life away from Tora observance, and begins to realize the importance of his Jewish identity when he is already 65 or 70 years old … It takes a lot of courage to admit that one has lived "wrong" all his life and it takes a lot of courage to revisit your life's journey at an advanced age. And this is why the great merit of this form of regret cannot be underestimated. Especially when this regret turns into "instruction." As in the case of a friend of mine who lived a life away from Judaism, and when he reached 70 years of age, he told his children: "I don't want you to follow my path. Learn Hebrew. Attend Synagogue and embrace our religion. " Regret, although a little late for oneself, has in this case a very important educational effect, preventing his descendants from acting in the same wrong way.

Something similar, but in a different area, happened with a famous actress who used to wear the most expensive natural furs, and after many years of ostentation, when she reached 60 years old, she decided to dedicate the rest of her life to advocate for the protection of animals. This is an example of reparative regret, which although it happens late in life, and it might be seen perhaps as questionable, has a value and should not be underestimated.

There are other cases of late repentance.

We often read in the news about some scandal involving a public official, usually in the world of politics, who was caught in an immoral situation –an illicit relationship or an act of corruption. Many times after the issue becomes public these people would stand in front of the television cameras, and publicly express their regret and ask forgiveness for what they have done and disappointed the public who trust him, his wife, his relatives, etc. This is undoubtedly a courageous gesture of repentance and contrition. However, it is questionable in terms of its credibility. Why? Because the process of repentance and apology did not happen "before" this person was caught, but as a consequence of being discovered. It is likely that what prompted this individual to repent is not conscience and conviction but convenience: the fear of losing his job, his reputation, his family, etc. And the doubt will always remain: had not been caught, would he have stop and repented?

According to Maimonides, credible repentance takes place if it happens while an individual is still involved, for example, in a immoral relationship and he realizes his mistake and stops when no one else knows about it. This would be the scenario of a complete and most credible Teshuba.

Because repentance comes when this man still has the chance to commit the same wrong act, having the same possibilities as before, the same energy and desire, but now he refrains thanks to a process of introspection that generated a new understanding. Or thanks to a renewed appreciation of religious principles and his resolution to change and be a better person. This is the ideal Teshuba.

Rabbi Abohab explains however, that even when repentance happens at a later time, and is far from ideal, it is still accepted by the Almighty.