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.

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.

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5. Repenting after suffering

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We are analyzing the 7 levels of Teshuba, repentance, formulated by Rabbi Abohab in his book Menorat haMaor (see below the first 4 levels).
The 5th level mentioned by Rabbi Abohab is when one repents after having suffered or experienced difficulties. These difficulties may or may not be related to our wrongdoing.
Let's see.
We have previously explained that negative experiences, for example a health issue, a work related problem or economic difficulties are seen by our Sages as experiences that help achieving Divine forgiveness. (see http://conta.cc/2g2cby1 , where we mention our limitations to understand why sometimes bad things happen to good people). In the text we are exploring today, however, we are NOT analyzing the relationship between suffering and being forgiven, but the relationship between suffering and repentance. In other words, this text explains that bad experiences have the potential to inspiring and pushing us to reestablish our relationship with the Creator.
There is a very famous paragraph in the Tora, in the book of Debarim (Deuteronomy) chapter 4, verse 30, which refers to collective Teshuba, when the people of Israel repents, and their captivity ends. Israel returns to HaShem and renews the observance of His covenant. This is what the Tora says: And at the end of the days, when you have lived in the midst of all these troubles and pains, you will return to HaShem your God and listen to His voice. Classical repentance, the most common one, comes as a result of having suffered. In this case, hatred, persecution or death in the hands of the nations in which we were exiled
This type of Teshuba, wake up after suffering, is not ideal but is very frequent. And it happens in so many ways. Many times a Jewish person who does not live a life of observance only wakes up and begins to assume his or her Jewish identity when he suffers contempt, hatred or mockery from an anti-Semite.
It also happens that many Yehudim come closer to God and to His Tora, for example, after having lost a relative. When one loses a loved one, at first he rebels, but then, as he advances in the stages of mourning, he comes to the acceptance of the new reality and reconciles with HaShem. Reconciliation

often brings us to a higher level than before, to a relationship with God that is now closer than what it was before suffering our loss.
Suffering is sometimes the only way to mature, grow, understand and value. When nothing is lacking and we have the power, resources and health to enjoy a high quality material life, we might forget HaShem, and without planning it, we asphyxiate our spiritual life. Mistakenly, we think that God is there, waiting for us to remember Him only when we need Him …. And it does not even occur to us to thank HaShem for having given us everything we have.
A father sent money to his son who studied abroad, every month. The father called the son very often, but the son never had time to talk to him. And it did not even occur to him to thank his father for remembering him every month. The father, consciously, stopped sending him money. At first, the son said nothing, but two months later, when he had no more funds, he called. "Daddy, how are you doing? Long time no talk! By the way, you did not send me money. Have you forgotten me? "
The generous father, who never forgot his son, had to force his son to endure deprivation in order for him to wake up and value the generosity of his father. The father was obliged to interrupt his support so that his son remembered him and returned to communicate with him. Rabbi Abohab explains that unfortunately many human beings (possibly most of us) remember God more to ask Him than to thank Him. It is as if sometimes God's last resource is to stop showering us with His blessings, to wake us up from materialism and spiritual lethargy. From this point of view, deprivation and suffering must be interpreted by us as God's call or His invitation for us to repent and remember Him, perhaps because we have failed to thank Him for all He has been giving us.

Repentance and security

cameras

We have explained that according to Rabbi Isaac Abohab, in his book Menorat haMaor, there are seven levels of Teshuba. That is, different circumstances in which, or by which, a person repents of the wrong actions that he or she did. These levels are classified according to certain categories. For example: 1.” When” the individual realizes that he did something wrong and stops doing it. 2. The level of consciousness. 3. If one repents beforeor after suffering the consequences of his or her wrongdoing, etc.

The highest level of Teshuba is reached when one repents by himself, self-motivated, immediately, and without having suffered any negative consequences of his bad actions.

A lower level than the first, is when one does NOT immediately realize what he did wrong and repeats his bad behavior until it becomes a bad habit. Repentance is triggered by an external but positive stimulus, for example, the Selihot, the Viduy, the Shofar, studying or listening words of Tora, etc.

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

Examples:

1. An employee with access to the merchandise, from time to time steals. He takes things from his workplace without anyone seeing him. Since he does not regret after stealing the first time (level 1), this behavior persists for a long time and becomes a habit (level 2), which the employee perfects to avoid being trapped. His conscience does not rebuke him. It is easy indeed to fool yourself when there is an interest in it. And he fabricates imaginary excuses: “The owners are very rich, it’s not going to affect them if I take something home.” ”The owners do not pay me enough.” “I’m working more than the other employees.” “My salary has been the same for a long time.” etc. But one day, he comes to his workplace as usual, and big surprise! The owners have installed security cameras! Circumstances now are different . He can no longer commit the same crime without being caught. His brain no longer creates justifications, and one day he realizes that fro years he has done something very wrong .… Leaving now aside the issue of restitution, confession, etc., Rabbi Abohab indicates that although this individual’s behavior changed

because circumstances changed and because he no longer has the same opportunities to steal, his “repentance”, though somehow questionable, is considered by the Torah to be valid. Let us remember that, this level of repentance is higher than, for example, repenting once one has been caught.

2. A businessman travels abroad by himself. And there, where nobody knows him, he is led by his temptation and proceeds in a wrong way. Then he returns home and regrets what he did. Of course, now he can not repeat his wrong behavior. Because the opportunity to commit a transgression is no longer there. Rabbi Abohab says explains, that although the opportunity to repeat his error does not existe anymore, the sincere repentance of this person is valid and accepted by the Tora. In other words, his Teshuba is valid, although it is not perfect.

3. For many years an individual is financially very well. Many people in need, approach him to ask for help, but this individual permanently says “NO”. He refuses to help his friends and neighbors with Tsedaqa. Over time, he persists in his selfish behavior and does not realize (or does not want to realize) that he is acting badly. Each year during the month of Elul and the Yamim Noraim (Rosh haShana, Yom Kippur) he says Selihot, listens to the Shofar, and learns about the importance of giving Tsedaqa, but still does not repent, and persists in his refusal to assist the poor. After a few years, he loses his fortune. And although he is not poor, money is not abundant. And now, when he can no longer help others, he regrets not having helped the poor. This repentance, while not ideal, is still valid and accepted.

The Sages explain that we must always aspire to repent immediately of having acted wrongly. Since when we repent of our wrongdoings, while the opportunity to continue acting bad still exists, we reach the highest level of Teshuba.

But the Sages also said that the doors of the Teshuba are never closed. And that no matter how far we have gone from HaShem and His commandments, He will always be willing to accept our repentance, even if it is not a perfect Teshuba.