TESHUVA

Rav Zachariah Gelley

The following note from Rav Zachariah Gelley in a contradiction between the following two sections: "Who is like Hashem, close whenever we call Him" and "Seek Him when He can be found," which implies (according to Rashi), that there are times when He can’t be found. The first section refers to public prayer, the second, to that of an individual. The Rambam then questions, when can an individual find Hashem? A wicked person should abandon his evil sin, and abandons it, is forgiven. This person recognizes and admits how evil his sin was, and abandons it, is forgiven. However, experience has proven that it is very difficult for habitual sinners to properly do Teshuva. It is easier to do Teshuva, due to the tremendous help from Above. And since it is easier to do Teshuva during this time, we have a greater obligation, and one who is negligent is more strictly accountable, as R’ Yisroel Salanter notes in Hilchos Teshuva. As the Rambam in Mishlei notes, “The punishment for white (strings of tzitzis) is greater than the punishment for the techailis (strings of tzitzis)”. Since white strings of tzitzis are not difficult to procure, we are punished more strictly for neglecting them than we would be for neglecting the blue strings of tzitzis.

However, despite the tremendous help from Above available in these ten days, past experience has proven that it is very difficult for habitual sinners to properly do Teshuva. The Rambam clearly explains that someone who sins because he was overcome by desire, will begin the teshuva process with a tremendous sense of regret, as it says in Mishlei “Mishloch Umetzu Tishrei - One who acknowledges their sin, and abandons it, is forgiven.” This person recognizes and admits how evil his sin was, and therefore makes a wholehearted determination never to succumb again.

In contrast, someone who is weak in a particular area, and repeats his sin many times, comes to feel as though the act is permissible, which makes regretting the sin impossible. The Rambam is referring to this scenario when he says “A wicked person should abandon his...”}

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The Rambam offers a novel insight in these areas “Teshuva always helps, but in the time from Rosh HaShana to Yom Kippur it is of even greater value and is more easily accepted, as it doesn’t have to be as complete (perfect).” He explains that even before Hashem created the world, He understood that we would not be able to survive without Teshuva, and therefore created the potential for Teshuva. Therefore on Rosh HaShana, the anniversary of creation, Hashem remembers to accept our Teshuva. However, since Rosh HaShana is a Day of Judgement, we do not want to mention our sins (in asking for forgiveness), so Hashem extended this period of forgiveness until Yom Kippur. With this we can understand the true meaning of the Rambam’s words “During these days, Teshuva is accepted immediately”.

The matter remains unclear. If one of the essential components of Teshuva is missing, e.g. regret, or the resolution to abandon the sin, it is not Teshuva. If all the necessary steps have been taken, then wouldn’t such Teshuva be accepted at any time of the year? **What are the parameters that define incomplete Teshuva that will accepted only during this time period?**

An explanation can be based on the words of the Rambam, as he clarifies the words שערת התרבבות משלים (Shurat Hirbuv Metilim) - If your actions are greater than your wisdom, your wisdom will endure”. This can only be true if a person truly accepts upon himself to keep the mitzvos, and follow the dictates of the chachamim, from that time, he is rewarded as though he kept all the mitzvos. Since all actions stem from the will, and he is determined to do what is right, he is credited with mitzvos that he doesn’t even know to fulfill.

In a similar vein, the Rambam explains in order to serve Hashem, he must: 1. choose an action, 2. decide to act on his desire, and 3. complete the act with his body. In truth, we can only accomplish the first, the choice, and then must daven and trust in Hashem that He will help us to accomplish that which we chose. In fact, we know that even if a person is unsuccessful in accomplishing what he chose, he is still given credit for the action, if his determination to accomplish it was sincere.

If this concept is applied to the topic of Teshuva, we might think that even if a person doesn’t feel regret (as the sin seems permissible to him, a result of repetition), if an awareness of sin exists, he can make a sincere resolution to correct his ways and be considered to have achieved Teshuva. However, in regard to Teshuva, which is the work of the heart - “כ רבי עקיבא א良くו מסע בפרצי חלבוב ל臾ת” - The matter is close to you, in your mouth and in your heart to do it” we have not accomplished Teshuva until we have succeeded in completing all the steps of Teshuva.

Herein lies the distinction between these days and the rest of the year: During these days, Hashem accepts even incomplete Teshuva. If a person has made a decision that he wants to correct his middos and his actions, he is considered to have achieved teshuva. During these days, this incomplete teshuva
will be accepted, despite the lack of regret, and despite it falling short of the Rambam’s standard – עד
던ר חכמים טובות, and he will merit a...

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יִתְנַעֲשֶׂה קָרָא זֶבַע, and told us how to appease . R’Tzadok HaKohen explains that if a person feels that he has not yet reached ‘
כָּלַע הָאָדָם, he might despair and feel that his teshuva is worthless. teaches us that even this teshuva can be
שנָהוּ בָּא דַבֵּר, and determine to correct our ways.

We can derive tremendous encouragement from these ideas, for we have learned that the essence of our
work during this time is to figure out what we need to fix, and decide to do so, and we will be considered
to have already done teshuva and thus merit a...