

Up Close and Personal

It is not across the sea nor is it in the heavens, rather it is in our mouths and hearts to do this mitzvah. What mitzvah is the Torah referring to here? The Ramban, among others, asserts that this is the mitzvah of *teshuva*. What is it about this mitzvah that makes it accessible to each person?

Every person has a *pintele yid*, that spark of connection to the Divine that can never be severed. This is the aspect of 'Magen Avraham', the promise that Hashem made to Avraham Avinu that He would always protect this part of us, that we will stay connected eternally. It is from this place that even the greatest *rasha* and sinner can always return.

The *Beit Yisrael* of Gur notes that we see this idea hinted at in the directive of Chazal concerning the punishment of *malkot* -- 40 lashes. Practically, person who deserves lashes is only given up to 39, not the full 40. In the discussion of the 40 lashes, the Torah calls the person who sinned a *rasha*. By reducing the number to 39, remarks the Beit Yisrael, we are in effect saying that this sinner is not a complete *rasha*. There is still a spark of goodness that has yet been untouched, he therefore has the power through his punishment to affect a complete *teshuva*.

The *Imrei Emet* of Gur reflects that there are 40 days between Rosh Chodesh Elul and Yom Kippur. These days of introspection and repentance correspond to the 40 lashes leading to change and growth. However, the *Imrei Emet* notes that *Chazal* refer to the two days of Rosh Hashana as "*yoma arichta*", one long day, so in reality we have 39 days not 40.



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This is a call to all of us that we are not completely hopeless. No matter how far we have fallen, there is still a part of us connected to holiness that we can access to do *teshuva*.

Teshuva, comments the Rambam, has the power to bring those who were far, close to once again be beloved to Hashem. When a person sins, he and any mitzvot he has done become distanced from Hashem. However, the mitzvah of *teshuva* is the exception, Hashem always keeps this mitzvah close and available. This, says Rav Schorr in *HaLekach Vhalebuv*, is one way to understand why the Ramban points to this mitzvah specifically. However far a person is, he possesses the force of *teshuva* and can return to Hashem, thereby elevating all his actions closer to Hashem.

The gift of *teshuva* is so powerful that even one who just “speaks with intention” and expresses a desire to do *teshuva* will have *siyata dishmaya* enabling the *teshuva* to penetrate his heart. Since we all have the inner desire to connect, we just need to fan the flames of the eternal spark we have within. ■



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