SHABBOS SHUVA 1987
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Rambam's Cherchas Teshuva we learn in the first four chapters all about Teshuva. We then learn in chapters 5 and 6 about free will. The Rambam then in chapter 7 returns to Teshuva. This does not seem to be logical. If we say that we are held accountable as human beings before the Holy One, Blessed be He, then, of course, we should have discussed free will in the very beginning. We should not have waited until chapters 5 and 6 to discuss free will. After all, the difference between a human being and an animal is that an animal is not morally culpable for any act he does. We may have to put dogs away sometimes and quarantine them and even put them to sleep because they have harmed human beings, but they are not in any sense morally culpable. They just act out of instinct. We human beings, though, have the capacity to control our instincts, and we can choose. Therefore, we are held culpable. G-d has, so to speak, withdrawn Himself from us so that we have the ability to act. That, of course, is the basis of Teshuva. Why didn't the Rambam speak about free will in the first chapters of his Teshuva? What's more, when he does return to Teshuva in the 7th chapter it seems that he is referring here to something more than he discusses in the first chapters. After all, according to Judaism it is what you do that counts not actually what you think. If you intend to do

something bad but never actually did it but only thought about it, then you are not really guilty which is different than if you intend to do something and if we fail to do it, according to our tradition, G-d gives us credit for it. On the other hand, if we try to do something bad and did not accomplish it, we just thought about it, G-d will dismiss it.

Here in the 7th chapter we learn about not deeds but character traits. We learn that we are supposed to Teshuva for anger. We are supposed to turn from anger and hatred and jealousy and from mocking and running after money and honor and being a glutton, etc. What do these things have to do with Teshuva? Teshuva means when we have sinned against an individual or G-d and we ask for forgiveness. It deals with concrete acts not with attitudes and character traits such as are discussed in chapter 7.

In order to understand this we can, in effect, take a look at chapter 1, the 4th paragraph, which raises another question which makes it hard for us to understand why the Rambam divided Teshuva and what he is talking about. In the first chapter we say that if a person does Teshuva, if he does it on a positive commandment that he failed to do then G-d immediately forgives him, but if he does it on a negative commandment that does not have with it Korais, then his Teshuva stands to Yom Kippur when then he is forgiven. If

he does violate Korais, which is excision, being but off from the Jewish people, or if he violates a capital punishment and he does Teshuva then Teshuva and Yom Kippur suspend the offense but until other sufferings come upon him he does not have complete forgiveness. If he has desecrated G-d's name then even Yom Kippur and Teshuva and other sufferings do not actually wipe away his sins until he dies.

We see that in the first chapters we are talking about a Teshuva which only cause sins to disappear gradually while in the 7th chapter we seem to be talking about an altogether Teshuva because it says, "Last night you were hated before G-d, detested, alienated, loathed, and today you are close and a friend..." In other words, it does not speak at all here about having to wait until Yom Kippur or having to wait until punishments come upon you or having to wait until your death, but you are forgiven immediately. Last night you were unclean. You were far from G-d's presence, but today you are clean and within His presence.

We know that when we sin we, in effect, causes two things to happen. We Mechaya, become liable for punishment because for every act there is an equal and opposite reaction, and we also become unclean, we Metameem. We feel an unease with ourselves. We feel guilty about what we have done. We

try many times to hide it with all sorts of rationalizations yet we have a certain unease, and it is this unease which eventually in many cases draws us to do Teshuva. We cannot stand the guilt and so, therefore, we respond by trying to rectify our past ways. After we have tried everything we possibly could to avoid confessing our sins and admitting what we have done then we come to a point where we have to cleanse ourselves of the terrible things we have done before.

The rabbis compare sin to a sickness and, therefore, they say, "I will cure you from your backsliding", that we, as human beings, suffer when we sin inside. We realize we have not fulfilled our human potential. We are not what we could be, and sometimes these glimmerings of disatisfaction with ourselves are very faint, but they are there. It is like sometimes when a person, G-d forbid, should get cancer and does not realize right away that he has cancer. The symptoms are not clear-cut like when you cut your finger and you feel the pain immediately. Many times when we suffer because of the sins we have committed we have to get rid of this inner pain, and, therefore, we repent. We decide we will not do what we did anymore. This, of course, is the type of Teshuva we are talking about in the first four chapters. It is the type of Teshuva which really does not have to do with free will in that sense. It has to do with getting rid of pain. It is not

like the Teshuva that is talked about in the 7th chapter. In the first four chapters it is true we are talking about returning to your better self and regretting your sin, but a person is doing this not because he, himself, believes his sin is really wrong but it gave him such displeasure. It is like a person who really enjoyed himself when he got drunk at night, but when he woke up the headache was unbearable so he determined that from now on he will not get drunk anymore, not because getting drunk is wrong but because he cannot stand the headache in the morning.

This is similar to the story of Abigail and David. Abigail was the wife of Novo. David had agreed to watch his flocks and make sure no marrauders or wild animals came to his flocks. When shearing time came David asked what his payment was. Novo said he did not owe him and David did not have to guard his sheep, etc. David was very mad and brought his whole band of men with him to take vengeance on Novo. Abigail found out David was coming and appeased him, gave him a gift, etc., and David thanked Abigail for stopping him from almost committing a sin himself by taking the law into his own hands and dispatching Novo and his men. That night Novo was drunk at a party and Abigail did not tell him anything. In the morning when he sobered up Abigail told him what almost happened, and the Tenach tells us that his heart failed when he heard what happened. He lingered for ten days and then

died. Based upon this, the rabbis say the Asheras should make sure the ten days of forgiveness are a model. Novo did not really regret his act. He was just scared of the consequences of his act. This is not really the free will that we talk about in Judaism when we mean a perfect free will. We are talking here of a person who is afraid of the consequences of his act. He is not saying the act, itself, is wrong.

In the second chapter the Rambam gives some illustrations of what we consider Teshuva Gemura, complete Teshuva, or Teshuva that helps but is not Gemura. They say Teshuva Gemura is when a person comes to the same situation, the same Aveira, he did before he separates from it not because he is afraid of another person or does not have the bodily strength to do it. Then Rambam gives another illustration of what would happen if you had illicit intercourse with a woman. After some time he was alone with her again and he still loved her and still had his bodily strength and was still in a place where he could not be found out, and he does not sin with her, then he is considered a complete Baal Teshuva. Even if he is with her but does not have the bodily strength or is afraid of her husband, etc., he is considered Teshuva because he did not finish what he intended to do, but this type of Teshuva in both cases where it is Gemura, is really based more on fear, on fear of the consequences of the act and not of the act, itself.

In other words, he does not do what he did before because he is afraid his conscience will bother you. He is afraid of some external force. It is not the act, itself, which bothers him but the consequences of the act. This type of Teshuva, although it helps, is known as Teshuva Me'era, Teshuva from fear. This is the type of Teshuva the Rambam talks about that waits until Yom Kippur until it is completely accepted. This is a Teshuva Me'era, a Teshuva from fear, fear of the consequences of your act, but it is not really a wholehearted belief that the act, itself, is wrong and despicable.

That's why the Rambam, in chapters 5 and 6, talks about free will. The type of free will here is when a person has chosen a whole new way of life, a way of life which he feels is beautiful and right and morally justified. In fact, in these instances he will probably not even be tempted by these same temptations, at least not in the same way. We learn in the Gemora that Veslocheesh says, "Anybody who looks at these three things, his eyes grow dim", and that is that if a person looks at a Nosi, a president, or a Kohen, or a rainbow his eyes grow dim. What does this mean? This does not mean a person will go blind if he sees these things. It means if a person does not appreciate the source of all this great beauty and love and does not realize the source of nature, then, of course, his eyes are dim and he does not have the full appreciation of the world as a person who can see these things.

The Rambam says in the Sefer Mitzvahs that we are supposed to believe in G-d. In the HaSovia Torah he says we are supposed to know G-d. What is the difference between believing in G-d and knowing G-d? When you believe in G-d you believe in Him. When you know G-d it does not mean you are a philosopher and know everything about Him, etc., because we Jews are not concerned about the character of G-d. We cannot really apprehend what G-d really is. It means you sense Him in all His ways. You know Him in all His ways, and that means you have to continually sense G-d's presence about you all the time. That means when you see a rainbow you do not just see the physical properties of the rainbow. After all, we can explain a rainbow by its physical properties, how its light gets reflected by raindrops, etc., but a person who sees a rainbow sees the beauty of nature and sees G-d behind it. He realizes that G-d is in existence. He is always standing in the presence of G-d. G-d is always with him. The same is true when he sees the Kohanim who are going to bless the people, because the Kohanim are commanded to bless the people with love. If the Kohen cannot bless the people with love then he is not supposed to bless the people. That is why when the Kohen come up to Duchan they stretch out their hands to the people. If they cannot stretch out their hand or keep their hand in a fist position then they are not allowed to bless the people. Any Kohen who cannot have love in his heart for all the Jewish people should not bless the people.

That is why, too, we do not Duchan in the Galut, the exile, on any days except the holidays because only on these days is our heart filled with love and we are not bothered with worldly concerns. Anybody who has not seen the love, the love of one man for another, the love between a husband and wife and cannot apprehend the Divine behind it, then that person's eyes are dim.

That is why marriage is so important in Judaism. The love between a husband and wife is an example of the love between G-d and Israel. Anyone who does not see this love and does not see something behind it, that you are standing in G-d's presence, their eyes are dim. The Nosi, the leader of the Jewish people who received the tradition from his forebearers like Yehoshua received it from Moshe, anybody who does not see a man of exceptional wisdom and piety and does not feel G-d's presence, his eyes, too, are dim. We are supposed to know G-d in all His ways. When we see a pious man like Rabbi Soleveitchik or Moshe Feinstein, etc., we should sense G-d's presence. These people are not super-human but they have something in their personality and presence which causes us to realize that G-d is behind all of us.

In fact, we even say a special brocha, "Chalek Mechamoso Meerov - G-d Who gave from His wisdom to those that fear Him". A person is asked to know G-d

in all His ways, to feel His presence. This is what we are supposed to chose. The first chapters of the Teshuva deal with specific acts that a person does wrong, and for specific acts we have to do Teshuva. That is true, but these specific acts you will probably repeat unless you have a change in your basic outlook and values. The true Teshuva in Judaism is when a person changes his value system. When a person does Teshuva because they are a pious, religious Jew it does not mean his personality will change. In fact, there are many parents who make a bad mistake. They think that if their child is lazy, or gets angry or has drug problems, if they send him to Israel everything will be cured. It will not be cured even if you send him to yeshiva. The rabbis tell us that before the Jewish people could accept the Torah all their ailments were cured. The Torah is for healthy people. What it is talking about here is those people who have qualities that they can use for good or bad, then it depends on their values. If their values are wholesome, then those inner personality qualities will be used for good. If a person gets angry all the time and runs with the wrong crowd he can turn out to be a murderer, but if he is in another crowd he uses his anger to fight oppression, to fight for the poor, etc. Every character trait can be for good or bad depending upon your value system. A person who exercises free choice and chooses Judaism and its value sytem, it can make a difference in his life. It will not change his

personality. I remember in yeshiva I went to my rebbe once complaining about some boys in class. I told him I thought Torah purified you and made you better and here their personalities were so blah and bad. The rebbe told me that if they were not there, though, they would probably be worse. The Torah helps a person develop what he has but it cannot change a person and make them what they are not. We are all born tall, short, with certain talents, etc., and we are also born with big souls and small souls. Some people are naturally more compassionate, but, of course, everyone can develop what he has, and that is what the Torah wants us to do. If a person has a correct value system, then he will not even be involved with certain situations which cause him to sin. If a person has a Torah Hashkocha he will not even be interested in drugs. It is not that he will not take them, or if he takes them he will push them aside. He will not even be interested in them. Certain things just do not interest you anymore if you have a different type of value system. If a person is married with a family with children he is so busy raising them he will not have to worry about running after all sorts of other things, and he will not have trouble being faithful to his wife if he loves her and shows attention to her, etc. if he finds his fulfillment in his family, but if he does not change his whole value system then he will be in trouble.

The first chapters of the Rambam's Teshuva have to do with Teshuva for specific sins but where the person does not change his whole value sytem so that he is constanting running into the same temptations over and over again and constanting putting himself into the same position, this is a Teshuva Me'era, a Teshuva from fear. It is true that many times people will desist from these sins but not because the sins, themselves, are so bad because really their value system does not condemn them very much, but because of the consequences of the sin. It is not so much that a person is against drugs but what the drugs do to him. They make him sick, etc.

In the 7th chapter when the Rambam speaks about Teshuva and a person accepts an entirely different value system this leads him away from all these type of problems. When he is able to refine his character and personality and traits for good and not for bad, this type of Teshuva brings immediate acceptance because you are not even going to be involved with these problems you were involved with before. Therefore, this type of Teshuva is referred to as Ge'ula, as a form of redemption, as a form of redeeming yourself. That is, of course, what we say in the prayers we recite on Yom Kippur. We say, "Return to me because I will redeem you." I will make you feel the importance of life. I will make you feel elevated spiritually because it is not that you just change this action here and this action there, but you

have chosen a whole different attitude toward life. If you choose this attitude you will not only be forgiven for your sins, but you will be, as the Rambam says, my friend, my beloved. You will no longer be alienated from G-d or from yourself or others, but you will feel pure inside and will be able to live a life of dignity and self-respect without having to fall into the pitfalls of life that you had fallen into before. Let us all hope and pray that in the coming year each of us will feel this purity and choose the correct values so that we will be close to G-d, to others, and ourselves and be deserving of a Happy, Healthy, and Prosperous New Year.