SHABBOS SHUVA 1985
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The Rambam, when he discusses Teshuva, says that there are three necessary ingredients to doing Teshuva. The first one is to recognize our sin. The second one is to regert that we did it. The third element is that we, from now on, determine not to do it again. When we make a confession for our sins these three elements must be in it. We must recognize that we sinned, regret that we did what we did, and resolve not to do it again. It is possible that a person can admit that he did what he did, but he could say it is not a sin. It is also possible that a person could say, "What I did was a sin but the other person deserved it, and I do not regret it." It is also possible that a person can say, "What I did was a sin and I regret it, but I will not be able to help myself, and I will do it again." The Rambam, in the Hilchus Teshuva, the laws of Teshuva, states that these three elements must be in every confession of sin.

In the Hilchus Maase Korbanos, in the laws of what you do when you bring a sacrifice, the Rambam speaks about another confession. When a person offered a sacrifice in the ancient Temple, he had to lay his hands on the animal and say, "I confess I sinned, I have done Teshuva, and this is my atonement." In other words, the confession that a person says when he offers a sacrifice is different than the confession that he says when he does Teshuva. Why should this be? What does this mean? We also learn in the Rambam that he says that if a person failed to make a confession for sins he already did Teshuva for, he can wait until next Yom Kippur and make confession. This does not make any sense because if he has done Teshuva, he has already made a confession. Here we see that the Rambam is talking about the second type of confession, the confession that we make during the time of the Korban.

The Kohen Godol during the Yom Kippur services confessed three times. Why should he have to confess three times? For Teshuva all you have to do is confess once. The answer, of course, is that his confession was a confession not of Teshuva but a confession for Teshuva. When a person does Teshuva he undertakes to change. The problem with Teshuva is, what does a person do with all the years and skills which he has acquired before he did Teshuva? We say that Teshuva transforms a person. It redeems him.

In a certain sense he becomes a new person. In the prayers we have two words for forgiveness. We use the word "Selach" and "Kapor." Selach means to forgive and purify. Kapor means just to cover over. When a person changes he can change in two ways. One way he can deny his past, deny the people he has grown up with and radically change everything about himself. This type of Teshuva is known as Kapora. In other words, he is still afraid that unless he makes a total break with his past and friends and family, he will revert to his old ways. He needs a new environment. His Teshuva flows, really, from factors outside himself. Unless he changes the outside factors, he will have difficulty maintaining his new state of Teshuva. That's why, many times, Baal Teshuva radically break with their past friends and family. This, the rabbis say, is not the highest form of Teshuva. This is Teshuva Me'era, Teshuva from fear.

There is, however, a higher form of Teshuva which is Teshuva Me'ava, Teshuva from love where a person does not radically break from his past, but he uses the skills and experiences he has gained in the past to do good. He does not break from his family and friends radically. Of course, if they do not keep kosher he does not eat a full meal at their house, but he can eat fruit, etc. His Teshuva flows from an inner conviction that is so strong that outside forces cannot touch it. The rabbis say that a person who is a Baal Teshuva stands on a higher plane than a Tzadek. They are talking, though, about a person who did Teshuva from love, Me'ava, and not Me'era. This explains why in the Gemora in Yoma we learn how Reshloches says that "great is Teshuva because it changes our willful sins into accidental sins." Later, people quote Reshloches as saying that "great is Teshuva because it changes our willful sins into merits." How can Reshloches say in one case it changes our willful sins into accidental sins, and in the other case it changes our willful sins into merits?

The answer is it depends on what type of Teshuva. If we do Teshuva Me'era, Teshuva from fear, then our sins become only accidental. We are in the wrong environment, etc. We, though, do not completely feel pure or holy. That's why we shun out past.

On the other hand, Teshuva Me'ava, Teshuva which comes from a deep inner conviction changes our willful sins into merits. How does it do that? It does it by allowing us to take the enthusiasm and verve and skills which we obtained through doing sins and impress them into the service of doing good. We all know how when someone gets mad, the passion they have for getting even and hurting someone is usually so much greater than the passion they have to help people they love. What we should do is use that same passion that we do evil with, and, instead, use it for good. When we brought the sacrifices in the Temple we said, "I have sinned, I have done Teshuva, and this is my atonement. I am covering my sins. I will not do them again." A person, though, who does Teshuva from Me'ava, from love, wants to be pure before G-d. He wants to take all the sins he did in the past, all the passion he had in the past, and use it now for good.

That's why the Kohen Godol, when he gives his confession, says, "I have sinned, your people have done Teshuva, and now may we be pure from the sins before G-d." We want on Yom Kippur not just to have our sins covered, to have our sins turned into accidental sins, but to turn them into merits by using the same enthusiasm and verve to do good as we have in the past to do evil. May the New Year see all our willful sins turned into merits, and may we not disown our past but use it to do good and, thus, merit a good year.