

SHABBOS SHUVA DROSHA 1990
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We learn in the Book of Leviticus when it speaks on the Day of Atonement that it says, "On this day He will atone for you to cleanse you from all your sins. Before G-d you shall be clean." There are two aspects to sin. One sin, Mechayas, a sin which obligates us for punishment, and that is why it says, "G-d shall make atonement for you", and the other aspect of sin is that it Metamais, it makes us feel unclean, and that is why it says, "G-d will cleanse you. Before G-d you shall become clean." When we recite the Al Chait, the sins that we have committed, we reinforce this teaching by saying, "On all these sins, G-d of forgiveness, Slach Lonu forgive us, Mechal Lonu pardon us, Kaper Lonu grant atonement for us." The word Slach stands for purify us, make us feel good about ourselves again. The word Mechal means to pardon us. Let us be free from punishment. Kaper Lonu means cover up our sins. May they disappear. In this prayer we ask for the maximum first. We ask to be made pure, not just to have our sins pardoned, and then we ask that G-d should pardon our sins, which means that He should forego punishment, and then lastly if He cannot do that at least He should forgive our sins even if it will entail some punishment.

We also in the prayer the Kedushas Hayom, the prayer which explains Yom Kippur, say, "Blessed are You, O G-d, King Who Mochails, Who forgoes punishment, Slach and Who forgives and makes pure our sins and the sins of His people, the House of Israel." Why does it mention here that G-d pardons and forgives our sins and the sins of His people, the House of Israel? The reason for it is that many times we can sin against the Jewish people while not sinning as a human being. For example, a man can give certain charity to the United Fund, Cancer Society, etc. but fail to give any charity to help Operation Exodus or the UJA of the synagogue, etc. He has not sinned as a human being. He has given charity, but he has sinned as a Jew.

In the Rambam's laws of Teshuva in the first chapter in the fourth section,

the Rambam says that even though Teshuva brings atonement for everything and the essence of Yom Kippur forgives, there are sins that are forgiven immediately and there are sins that are not forgiven until after a time. We can understand what the Rambam means when he says that Teshuva forgives everything, but what does it mean when he says that the day of Yom Kippur, itself, forgives?

In the second section of the first chapter the Rambam explains how the scapegoat which used to be offered in the Temple forgave all the sins in the Torah, whether they were easy sins or hard sins as long as a person did Teshuva, but even if a person did not do Teshuva his sins were forgiven if they were light sins. However, hard sins were not forgiven unless a person did Teshuva. Hard sins he defines as any sins which would have brought the death penalty or excision. In a Jewish court it is almost impossible to convict anybody because the laws of evidence are so difficult. It is Judaism who propounded the theory that you are innocent until proven guilty. In Europe in the Napoleonic code you are not innocent until you are proven guilty. The reason we believe this is because there is a G-d in the world and He will take care of the guilty. It is better that 1000 guilty people be let go than one innocent person be convicted. The reason we have courts is to maintain society order so things will not get out of hand, but G-d will take care of the guilty.

This definition of hard sins means those sins which brought the death penalty, like murder and kidnapping, or which brought excision, like eating chometz on Pesach or not fasting on Yom Kippur. Normally the Rambam has a different definition for hard and easy sins. A hard sin is any sin that would bring stripes. Here, however, though, he is not talking about sins as a human being because every human being is under a covenantal relationship with G-d since the time of Noah. He is talking about those sins that we do specifically as Jews. Those sins

that cut us off from the Jewish people cannot be forgiven by just showing up on the day of Yom Kippur without Teshuva. However, other sins that we do as a Jew can be forgiven even without Teshuva if we just identify with the Jewish people. Failure in the past to pay dues to a synagogue or failure to support Israel or failure to help Jews flee persecution even though we have given charity to other organizations and helped other people can be forgiven by just once again establishing a good link to the Jewish people and contributing to Jewish organizations, etc. Those sins, though, that we do as a human being can only be forgiven if we do Teshuva.

It is hard, though, to understand why it is that the Rambam says in section four that there are certain sins which are forgiven immediately when we do Teshuva and certain sins which are not. He says that if a person violates a positive commandment that does not have excision and he does Teshuva, immediately the punishment is all foregone, and he uses the word Mochail. If a person violates a negative commandment that does not have excision of the death penalty and he does Teshuva, the Rambam says that the punishment is suspended until Yom Kippur when atonement comes. He says that if a person violates a sin which brings excision or the death penalty and does Teshuva, then the Teshuva and Yom Kippur suspend the punishment until different types of pains come and then his atonement is completed. It is very hard to understand this statement of the Rambam since in chapter seven of the Rambam we learn that Teshuva, repentance, immediately brings a person close to G-d. He says, "So great is Teshuva that it brings close those that are far. Yesterday this person was hated before G-d and was detested and an abomination. Today he is blessed and a friend, that sins alienate a person from G-d but Teshuva brings him close." He does not speak here about any sins being suspended until Yom Kippur or until pains come. Last night you are hated and today you are loved. What's going on here?

It is also true that the rabbis say that when the Torah speaks about punishment coming on a person that they modify what we mean by punishment. In G-d's eyes a Masha, a little bit, is considered like the whole thing. We have the Halachic concept that sometimes just a little prop of something is enough to nullify a huge quantity against it or to affect a multimillion dollar transaction. For example, an infinitesimal amount of chometz that is put into Pesadicha things makes this thing chometz. This applies also in certain laws of Terumah, the Kohen, etc. We also know that a pruta, or something worth the equivalent of a penny or two, can affect a sale of a multimillion dollar office building. We know that if I give a pruta as a buyer of an office building to the seller and announce that with this pruta I am acquiring this building after we have agreed upon the price, the building immediately is transferred to my possession. When it comes to punishment we also say that a little bit in G-d's eyes is sufficient. We also have the concept of Haleefeem, which means exchange. Sometimes we can even effect a transfer without any money exchanging hands at all. The buyer can take out his handkerchief and give it to the seller after the price is agreed, and the seller, by grabbing hold of the handkerchief, immediately transfers the multimillion dollar office building to the buyer. No money at all exchanged hands. G-d, too, when He punishes us can exchange physical punishment to spiritual punishment. We can be affected by pangs of conscience and great unease and this can be the punishment which cleanses the sin.

There also is the whole concept of the scapegoat which mitigates punishment. We know that one of the reasons that the two identical goats were brought on Yom Kippur and one was offered on the altar and one was sent out to the wilderness was that we remind G-d that we are all subject to circumstances beyond our control. Lots were thrown to determine which goat went on the altar and which goat went to the wilderness. Sometimes we remind G-d that it is only because of different

temptations which have come our way which have caused us to sin. However, there is another explanation for the scapegoat, and that is the one given by the Ramban, which seems completely foreign to Jewish thinking and even seems akin to idol worship. The Ramban says that we sent the scapegoat into the wilderness as an offering to Satan. Of course, in the Jewish religion we do not believe that satan is an independent power. We would disagree with Milton's description of him in Paradise Lost. He is not a rebel or a fallen angel. He is G-d's prosecuting attorney. We are only giving him this offering because G-d told us to. This is similar to if I decided to give a big present to a king and the king said, "I accept your present, but why don't you give this part to my prime minister?" That is exactly what we say when we offer the two goats. We say that they are both offerings to G-d. G-d just commands us to give part of His offering to one of his servants: satan. The Ramban means by this that many times we offer up our energies for things we should not really do. We dedicate ourselves so much to our job that we neglect our family and, therefore, cause our wife and children great anguish. This may even lead to divorce. Many times for the sake of social advantage we say and do things which are beneath us and which cause us great anguish. Many times in order to save a business we may also do things that make us ashamed. The scapegoat ceremony is meant to tell G-d, "Please, we have already suffered enough. The energies that we gave, so to speak, to the devil have caused us so much grief already, please accept them as our punishment." The rabbis say G-d will, so we see from here that G-d, even when He punishes us, punishes us very lightly. Either He mitigates the punishment by making it a very small amount or He changes it from a physical punishment to a spiritual punishment, or He accepts our suffering which has already come to us as a direct result of our sin as punishment.

This is all very well and good, but it still does not answer our question. How can the Rambam say in the seventh chapter that immediately after you do Teshuva you are accepted? Perhaps the answer to this question can be found in the second chapter of the Rambam's work on Teshuva. In the first section the Rambam speaks about complete Teshuva and not complete Teshuva. The Rambam says that complete Teshuva is indicated when a person comes upon the same circumstances that caused him to sin before and he does not sin now. This did not happen because he is afraid or has lost his vitality, but even if he does not sin this time because he is afraid or has lost his vitality, nevertheless the Rambam says this is still considered Teshuva. We see from this there are several types of Teshuva. In the Gemora Sanhedrin we learn how Resh Lokesh says that Teshuva changes the purposeful sins of man into accidental sins, and then a few sentences later Resh Lokesh says that Teshuva changes the purposeful sins of man into merits. How is this possible, the rabbis in the Talmud ask? Resh Lokesh is completely contradicting himself, but they answer, no, the first case is when man does Teshuva from fear. He does Teshuva because he hates the uneasy feeling it gives him. I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who cheated on his income taxes. He felt so bad about it that he sent a check for \$1000 to the I.R.S., and he said in his letter, "If I still can't sleep, I'll send you the rest." Many times people do Teshuva not because they are convinced it is the right thing to do but because their conscience bothers them or they are afraid of a husband's wrath or afraid they will be caught but not because of real conviction. They are not repeating the sin but they do not intend to repeat the sin and they are sorry that they did the sin, but they really are not filled with conviction. They are not pursuing the sin anymore because of fear, not because they love G-d and only want to do the right thing.

In the fourth section of the first chapter of the Rambam, the Rambam there is talking about sins in which punishment is foregone because of Teshuva or where punishment is suspended until Yom Kippur or until pangs come upon a person.

In that section he is talking about Teshuva that is only based on fear of punishment.

It is not based on the desire to be pure. That's why in this section he just uses the word Mochail, not the word Slach, but if a person wants more than just to have punishment foregone, if a person wants to stand before G-d pure, then Teshuva immediately erases all vestiges of sin. That's what the Rambam is talking about in chapter seven. If all a person is interested in is escaping punishment then the laws of section four of the first chapter apply, but if a person wants more than that, if a person wants to be pure he will act on a higher level and he can be assured that G-d will forgive him immediately and make him pure because, as we say in the Book of Leviticus, "On this day G-d will make atonement for you to purify you from all your sins. Before G-d you shall be pure."

May we all desire not only to escape punishment but also to be pure so that our Teshuva will be accepted immediately and we will be given a healthy, happy, and good new year.