



Too Far for Teshuva?

Class 1

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Textual Setup

(1) שמות י:א-ב

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל-פַּרְעֹה כִּי-אֲנִי הִכְבַּדְתִּי אֶת-לְבֹבוֹ וְאֶת-לֵב עֲבָדָיו לִמְעַן שְׁתִּי אֹתָתִי אֵלָה בְּקִרְבּוֹ:
וְלִמְעַן תִּסְפֹּר בְּאָזְנִי בֶןֶךְ וּבֶן-בֶּןֶךְ אֶת אֲשֶׁר הִתְעַלְלֹתִי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת-אֹתָתִי אֲשֶׁר-שִׁמְתִּי בָם וַיִּדְעוּתָם כִּי-אֲנִי ה':

1) Exodus 10:1-2

Then YHVH said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh. For I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his courtiers, in order that I may display these My signs among them, and that you may recount in the hearing of your child and of your child’s child how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them—in order that you may know that I am YHVH.”

(2) רש"י על שמות י:א

"וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל פַּרְעֹה" - וְהִתְרַה בּוֹ:

2) Rashi on Exodus 10:1

“Then YHVH said to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh.’” - To warn him.



(3) הרמב"ם בפ"ו מהל' תשובה

ואפשר שיחטא אדם חטא גדול או חטאים רבים עד שיתן הדין שמונעין ממנו התשובה ואין מניחין לו רשות לשוב מרשעו כדי שימות ויאבד בחטאו שעשה... ולפיכך כתוב בתורה ואני אחזק את לב פרעה, לפי שחטא מעצמו תחלה והרע לישראל נתן הדין למנוע התשובה ממנו עד שנפרע ממנו, לפיכך חזק הקב"ה את לבו.

ולמה היה שולח לו ביד משה ואומר שלח ועשה תשובה וכבר אמר לו הקב"ה אין אתה משלח וכו', כדי להודיע לבאי עולם שבזמן שמונע הקב"ה תשובה לחוטא אינו יכול לשוב אלא ימות ברשעו שעשה בתחלה ברצונו.

3) Rambam Mishneh Torah, Repentance 6:3

A person may commit a great sin or many sins causing the judgment rendered before the True Judge to be that the retribution [administered to] this transgressor for these sins which he willfully and consciously committed is that his Teshuvah will be held back. He will not be allowed the chance to repent from his wickedness so that he will die and be wiped out because of the sin he committed... For these reasons, it is written in the Torah [Exodus 14:4], "I will harden Pharaoh's heart." Since, he began to sin on his own initiative and caused hardships to the Israelites who dwelled in his land as [Exodus 1:10] states: "Come, let us deal wisely with them," judgment obligated that Pharaoh be prevented from repenting so that he would suffer retribution. Therefore, The Holy One hardened his heart.

Why did [God] send Moses to [Pharaoh], telling him: "Send [forth the people], repent"? The Holy One had already told Moses that he would not release [the people], as [Exodus 9:30] states: "I realize that you and your subjects [still do not fear God]." [The reason is stated in Exodus 9:16:] "For this alone, I have preserved you... so that My name will be spoken about throughout the earth," i.e., to make known to all the inhabitants of the world that when the Holy One withholds repentance from a sinner, he cannot repent, but he will die in the wickedness that he initially committed willfully.



4) Netivot Shalom (R. Shalom Noach Berezovsky, 1911-2000), Slonimer Rebbe , Teshuvah, #9

The task of a person, to suggest a parable, is like that of a person who is building an elaborate house on a foundation of rubble. If he doesn't want to invest money and effort to dig deep and solid foundations, the building will not have a strong base and therefore cracks will keep appearing in the walls. Each time the person will have to spend a lot of money all over again in order to strengthen the building, and yet nevertheless this will have no real utility, because more fissures will appear, and the house will always be in danger of collapse.

There is only one path before him, and that is to have the courage to destroy the whole structure of the house and to dig deep and strong foundations. On top of those foundations, he can build and establish a strong building.

The same applies in the realm of teshuvah. Each year a person introduces repairs and improvements in his spiritual home, but nevertheless since the whole thing isn't built on strong foundations, new cracks and fissures appear year after year, and his spiritual structure always threatens to collapse. Only when he arrives at a state in which he has courage and understands that all of these minor repairs will not solve the problem of his life until he digs deep foundations and first roots out the root that yields gall and wormwood [meaning: the root of all evil]—then he can build a structure that endures forever.

This is the thought process with which a Jew must approach teshuvah, to the point that the One who knows all secrets can testify on his behalf that this year he really wants to dig strong foundations for his spiritual home, foundations able to withstand life's trials—and the foundation will not be rickety, and the building will not collapse.

5) Netivot Shalom on Parashat Bo (translation by Rabbi Abe Schacter Gampel)

Therefore, according to Rambam, Moses' going to Pharaoh had nothing to do with warning him, because there was no possibility for him to repent.

However, according to Rashi and many other commentators, Pharaoh still had the ability to repent and that is why God sent Moses to warn him. "For I have hardened his



heart,” even though I have hardened his heart there is still another path towards repentance (*teshuva*). You may ask, how is it possible that there’s another path towards repentance if God already hardened his heart?

Ordinary and Extraordinary Strengths: *Teva* vs. *Al HaTeva*

One can find a parallel as it relates to our physical world. A person possesses ordinary (*teva*) strengths that are known and familiar to them. In addition to those strengths, God grants a person hidden strengths beyond the ordinary, of which they are unaware under normal circumstances. It is only in a moment of danger when one’s ordinary strength is not enough, that these extraordinary (*al hateva*) capabilities are revealed by which one can be saved. Like a person drowning in the sea may find various ways to stay alive through strength they didn’t know they had.

So too, a parallel exists regarding spiritual matters. While one is aware of their ordinary strengths, there are hidden, extraordinary strengths that God has planted within them that are only awakened during a time of danger in order for that individual to find a path forward.

So too, regarding repentance. One can perform repentance with their ordinary strengths and one can also perform repentance through extraordinary measures... This strength is hidden in every person. Through accessing this extraordinary place one can achieve a higher repentance, and for some issues can’t be fixed by ordinary, lower repentance.

The way to access and awaken this extraordinary strength is to believe that God desires “that no one may be kept banished” (2 Samuel 14:14). Even when one cannot find any path forward and they feel as if they are completely in the hands of the evil inclination and have no strength to conquer it, one knows and believes that God desires “that no one may be kept banished.” God has planted within their heart hidden strength that is greater than what they ordinarily possess. With that strength one can return even in instances that one would not be able to do so ordinarily...

This now explains the matter of Pharaoh. Even though “I have hardened his heart” there is still an extraordinary path towards repentance. Therefore God sent Moses to



warn him that there is still another path and it is within his strength to return. However, Pharaoh denied that there existed anything that ruled over the ordinary world. As he says: “Who is the Lord that I should heed Him ... I do not know the Lord” (Exodus 5:2). Just as Pharaoh denied the existence of God, that the world is ruled by Someone above, so too, he did not believe that in this world, below, one can possess extraordinary strength that transcend the ordinary...

And so it was with Acher, when the heavenly voice proclaimed “return straying sons, all except for Acher,” and he despaired of the possibility of teshuvah. It says in the Zohar that it was forbidden for Acher to accept this heavenly voice, and he should have repented anyway...The Reishit Chochmah says...that anything that God commands us to do, we must do, except if God tells “Leave my house and do not enter again,” as with Acher....And what the heavenly voice meant when it said “all except for Acher” was that there was no salvation for him in a natural way, but he should have still tried to overcome and to believe in the forces that transcend the ordinary, through which he could return. There is always a way for a Jew to return...

And a similar matter can now be explained regarding the Exodus. Within the realm of the ordinary, Israel was not worthy to be redeemed since they were sunk in 49 gates of impurity. But because “the people believed,” (Exodus 4:31) they believed in the hidden extraordinary strengths that God had planted within them so “that no one may be kept banished” they were able to summon that extraordinary strength.

The Torah commands us to “remember the Exodus from Egypt all the days of our lives” (Deuteronomy 16:3). “And the sages taught: ‘all the days of your life,’ to include also the nights,” (Mishna Berakhot 1:5). Therefore in all instances of darkness that ordinarily don’t seem to have a path forward, one must believe that they possess extraordinary hidden strength, and it is within their capacity to emerge from the most challenging of circumstances...

It is this aspect of leaving Egypt that can be awoken within oneself every day, as it says “remember the Exodus from Egypt all the days of our lives.”

