

## LOVE MEANS SAYING I'M SORRY

With the excitement and beauty of a new relationship, there inevitably arrives the moment where I may have said or did something that I should not have done. In that moment, I have a choice. The immediate, instinctual response is to rationalize the behavior. This is easier; it saves me from admitting defeat and the pain it brings along. It saves me from taking a deeper look at myself and dealing with my inner critic. However, the easier path, may not be the path that is consistent with my values, with Torah values. Eating cake instead of exercising brings pleasure in the moment, however, in due time, it will bring me greater pain. There is a beautiful *Midrash Tanchuma* in the beginning of *Parashas Re'eh*:

משל לזקן שהיה יושב על הדרך, והיו לפניו שתי דרכים, אחת תחלתה קוצים וסופה מישור, ואחת תחלתה מישור וסופה קוצים, והיה יושב בראש שתיהן ומזהיר העוברים, ואומר להם, אף על פי שאתם רואים תחלתה של זו קוצים, לכו בה, שסופה מישור. וכל מי שהיה חכם שומע לו והיה מהלך בה ומתיגע קמעא. הלך בשלום ובא בשלום. אבל אותן שלא היו שומעין לו, היו הולכים ונכשלין בסוף. כך היה משה, פירש לבני ישראל ואמר להם, הרי דרך החיים ודרך המות, ברכה וקללה, ובחרת בחיים למען תחיה אתה וזרעך<sup>1</sup>

Every day, we are faced with numerous decisions. In those moments, I can behave instinctually and follow the easier path, or, I can take a step back to see the greater picture. Restraining instinct is difficult, yet, consistent with the person I truly want to be. We choose how to respond to error. There is a scene in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's "The Little Prince":

"Why are you drinking?" demanded the little prince.  
"So that I may forget," replied the tippler.  
"Forget what?" inquired the little prince, who already was sorry for him.  
"Forget that I am ashamed," the tippler confessed, hanging his head.  
"Ashamed of what?" insisted the little prince, who wanted to help him.  
"Ashamed of drinking!"

When we err, we can either face the mistake and the shame involved or we can continue to turn away. One of the core features of Teshuva is the ability to face oneself, the strength to embrace discomfort, the decision to tread the road with thorns. In the *Rambam's Hilchos Teshuva* (2:4), he writes:

מדרכי התשובה להיות השב צועק תמיד לפני השם בבכי ובתחנונים

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<sup>1</sup> On page 304 in Rabbi Paysach Krohn's "In the Spirit of the Maggid", he quotes Rabbi Yaron Halbertal as saying that the above *Medrash* is alluded to in *Mishlei* 19:21, היא תקום ה' איש ועצה ה' היא תקום, for the word תקום is an acronym for תחלתה קוצים וסופה מישור. This can be interpreted one of two ways: 1. The advice of *Hashem* is to choose the path that is initially difficult and afterwards pleasant or 2. The path of *Avodas Hashem* is initially difficult and afterwards pleasant. According to the first understanding, the difficulty may only be in perception, yet upon actually following that path, it is not as difficult as it appeared. According to the second interpretation, the path is experientially initially difficult.

Among the paths of repentance is for the penitent to  
constantly call out before God, crying and entreating;

Where do these tears come from? What is the person crying for? Perhaps it is the pain of looking at oneself and saying “I messed up”, “I should have acted differently”. *Teshuva* done properly should be painful<sup>2</sup>, yet also beautiful. It enables me to return. A return to myself; to be brutally honest with myself. A return to *Hashem*; by admitting my mistake, I unite with the one I love. A simultaneous return to both; when I return to my true self, I am returning to the divine within me, I am connecting with my creator. Saying sorry is difficult, yet rewarding. In the words of *Shlomo Hamelech*, מודה ועוזב ירחם, ומודה ופשיעו, לא יצליח; ומודה ועוזב ירחם, *The One who covers his sin will not succeed; but he that admits and leaves them will obtain mercy*<sup>3</sup>. When we face that critical moment, when faced with our two roads diverged in a wood, which one will we choose? Because, it will make all the difference.

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<sup>2</sup> On the verse, שבת שבתון היא לכם, ועניתם את-נפשתיכם--חקת, עולם, (Vayikra 16:31) the Abarbanel comments that the *innuy*, the physical pain of Yom Kippur corresponds to the emotional pain of *Teshuva*.

<sup>3</sup> Mishlei 28:13. R. Hirsch beautifully elaborates on this verse: “Even the most depressing awareness – of having committed some wrong – does not irredeemably rob him of his good spirits. Once he has recognized his wrong deed, he tries not to cover it up and let it gnaw at him in the dark recesses of his subconscious. He knows that such self deception will get him nowhere. He rather views his act undisguisedly, in a clear light, admits it to himself and before God, and tries to make up for it as best as possible. Before God he earnestly promises to avoid such guilty acts in the future; and from this serious determination he regains the serenity that is essential to the fulfillment of our duty” (*From the Wisdom of Mishlei*, pg. 222).