

"Rather, the matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart to perform it." (30:14)

The *Ramban* and *Sforno* assert that this *pasuk* relates to the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*, repentance. The heart, the seat of emotion, recognizes when one has sinned, and the mouth expresses this sin through the vehicle of *viddui*, confession. We must endeavor to understand what goes on in the mind of a *rasha*, sinner. If *teshuvah* is so close, why does it remain "so far" from him ?

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, z.l., contends that man's ultimate downfall is invariably due to his ability to adapt and become complacent to a situation. By "force of habit" people become set in a routine from which it is very difficult to extricate themselves. They need to be awakened from their self-imposed spiritual slumber. If they would only confront reality, then suddenly, when their defenses are down, they would quickly realize their fate.

Rav Chaim cites the famous *Midrash*, which relates the story of Yakum of Tzroros, the nephew of the *Tanna*, R' Yossi ben Yo'ezer. Yakum was riding a horse on *Shabbos*, and he came upon his uncle being led to the gallows, to be executed for defying the authorities and adhering to the *Torah* and *mitzvos*. Displaying not the slightest bit of compassion and sensitivity, Yakum began deriding his uncle, poking fun at his religious conviction. He even mocked his martyrdom for a cause which he felt was worthless. At this most solemn moment, at this time of R' Yossi's greatest distress, his nephew not only did not speak words of consolation and support, but he mocked him! Imagine the callousness and soullessness of this person. In an unparalleled display of patience and compassion for the soul of his nephew, R' Yossi responded, "If this is how Hashem acts towards those who do His will, how much more with those who anger Him?"

Chazal comment that the impact of R' Yossi's retort entered into Yakum's heart like a serpent's venom, penetrating the very recesses of his emotion, inspiring his sudden intense *teshuvah*. He immediately subjected himself to four methods of execution as penance for a life of sin. R' Yossi fell asleep and saw a vision of Yakum flying in the air. He exclaimed, "In a brief moment (of *teshuvah*), he has preceded me to *Gan Eden*."

This *Midrash* demonstrates how a person whose life had revolved around iniquity, whose heart had been as cold as stone, who had viewed sin as routine, was suddenly shocked back to "life," so that he performed sincere *teshuvah*. Hashem offers us many instances during the course of the year which should arouse us from a life of routine and inertia to a life of vitality in serving Him. Regrettably, we either do not notice, or we say, "He means someone else." What does it take to make us realize that He means us? Hopefully, we will wake up on our **own**. As we stand before Hashem in supplication during the upcoming *Ymei Ha'Din*, Days of Awe and Judgment, we should reflect over the past year. We should note the various messages that we have received from Hashem and be inspired to perform *teshuvah* on our own.