

When you will go out to war...and you will see among its captivity a woman who is beautiful of form, and you will desire her, you may take her to yourself for a wife. (21:10,11)

The *Torah* offers a release for the Jewish soldier who is far away from his home and under the strain of battle. It provides a contingency for the soldier who, in constant fear for his life, gives in to an uncontrollable desire for a beautiful captive. The soldier may marry her after she has undergone a specific process. Knowing that she will be permitted to him later may encourage him to refrain from any inappropriate advances now. While this is a special dispensation, it still should be regarded as inappropriate and even sinful. Indeed, *Chazal* attribute the character of the rebellious son to a union with a *yefas toar*, beautiful captive, in which the Jewish soldier gave in to his base desires and made use of the *Torah's* dispensation. If *Chazal* view this action as sinful, undoubtedly it requires *teshuvah*, repentance.

Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger, Shlita, derives this idea from an apparent contradiction in *Chazal*. We are taught that Reuven is considered to be the first one to have made an "official" *teshuvah*. Indeed, in this merit, his descendant, Hoshea was the one to admonish *Klal Yisrael* with the words, "*Shuvah Yisrael*," "*Repent Yisrael*." He led *Klal Yisrael* in *teshuvah*. The fact that Reuven was the first to repent seems inconsistent with another *Midrash* that attributes this status to Kayin. Kayin told his father Adam *Ha'Rishon*, "I repented and came to terms with the Almighty". Immediately, Adam responded, "This is the awesome power of *teshuvah*, and I was never aware of it." How are we to reconcile these two disparate *Midrashim*?

Horav Schlesinger explains that Kayin repented for a sin that any human being would realize is evil. Murder is a serious crime which demands an enormous amount of *teshuvah*. The human conscience is such that a murderer expresses contrition as a natural reaction to the most horrendous act possible. Such a response is not a free-will action; rather, it is an automatic human response. In contrast, Reuven acted in a manner that did not really reflect evil. He easily could have justified his actions as the expression of a son jealous for his mother's sake. It was a sin - but of a nature that most people would never recognize as a sin - and certainly would not condemn. Yet Reuven realized his error, and he proceeded to perform *teshuvah*. This was a truly remarkable act. He was the first person to repent for an *aveirah* that many might even have mistaken for a *mitzvah*. That response represents the highest level of *teshuvah* - and Reuven was the first to come to this understanding.