

## Kayin said to Hashem “Is my iniquity too great to be borne.” (4:13)

Kayin committed a grave sin. To take a human life is a heinous act of aggression. Yet, *Chazal* teach that Kayin did *teshuvah*, repented, for his terrible crime. What is the meaning of his *teshuvah*? Can this *teshuvah* bring back Hevel? Obviously, it is impossible to bring back the deceased. Hevel is gone. He is not coming back – regardless of the sublimity of Kayin's *teshuvah*. Murder is different than robbery. A thief can return the money. The murderer has taken a life, which he cannot bring back.

**Horav Shimon Schwab, zl**, explains that, indeed, this is the wonder of *teshuvah*. When one repents with sincerity, is truly brokenhearted over his misdeed, Hashem considers it as if his crime had never happened. Hashem expunges the act, negating it completely. Hashem created the world *ex-nihilo*, *yeish meiyain*, something from nothing. By accepting a person's sincere *teshuvah*, He makes *ayin miyeish* – nothing from something. This, explains *Rav Schwab*, is the meaning behind *Chazal's* statement that *teshuvah* was created before the world came into existence. How could anything have been created before the world came into being?

The world was formed as a tangible reality out of nothing. Only Hashem can do this. To create something from nothing is scientifically impossible. Therefore, the world must be Hashem's doing. By negating an *aveirah*, sin, a reality that occurred, transforming it into nothing, is much like creating the world. In this sense, *teshuvah* was created before the formation of the world, since *teshuvah* returns conditions to where they had been before creation, to the status of *ayin*, nothingness. Thus, the sinful act is considered null and void.

This is the miracle of *teshuvah*. One who repents, recites *viduy*, confesses to his sins. His heartfelt emotion is real; it is sincere. He demonstrates his shame and promises never to act in such a nefarious manner again. Hashem is compassionate. He knows what the sinner is experiencing. He is acutely aware of his sincerity and remorse. Then Hashem forgives him and wipes his slate clean. Regardless of his original motivation to sin, whether it was the result of a lack of knowledge of what connotes a wrongdoing or deference to his base passions, even if he sinned out of spite, as long as he is now regretful, his *teshuvah* will be accepted.

*Rav Schwab* relates an emotion-laden story that should inspire every one of us. While the *Rav* still lived in Baltimore, he was called to visit a Jew from Vienna, who was sadly dying from tuberculosis. As he walked into the room, the man asked, “How much do you charge?” The *Rav* immediately replied, “I never charge anything.” “That is good,” the man said, “because I have no money.” The patient then asked the nurse to leave the room, so that he could be alone with the rabbi. He began to have a coughing fit, which the nurse was able to calm down before she agreed to leave.

When they were alone, the man began to relate his life story. He was born into a religious family in

Vienna. Despite being raised observant, he deferred to his desires and rejected everything as soon as he was old enough to get away with it. He lived an undisciplined and unrestrained life of abandon. He married a girl who was Jewish in name, but, in practice, she was no different than he was. Together, they raised a son to outdo his father, when he married out of the faith. It was then that it hit him. Everything that he had rejected, all of his earlier religious misdeeds, came to haunt him as he witnessed the tragedy of having a child marry out of the Jewish faith. He was here now, filled with remorse, weeping over a life that he wholeheartedly regretted. He wanted the rabbi to listen to his *viduy*, confession.

Suddenly, the man began to scream! He shouted out Hashem's Name, and then he spoke directly to the Almighty, "*Ribono Shel Olam*, I was the greatest sinner! I wasted my life! How can I appear before You?" The scene of this sick man on his death bed, amidst wracking cough and bitter tears, was heartrending. Indeed, *Rav Schwab* said that, whenever he remembered the image of the man lying in bed screaming out to Hashem for forgiveness, he would tremble. The man began to cough uncontrollably, and the nurse was called in.

*Rav Schwab* attempted to calm the man, "Do not get excited. I will come again to visit you. There is no need to tell me everything today. I will see you again tomorrow."

Sadly, there was no tomorrow. In middle of the night, the *Rav's* phone rang: "Can you come to a funeral? A man has died, and he was all alone; there is no one to take care of things." The funeral home needed a rabbi to perform a service, to bury a man who had died with no one at his side, no one to call, no one who seemed to care.

When *Rav Schwab* arrived, he saw that the deceased was the man that he had visited earlier that day. They barely put together a *minyán* for his funeral, and those who came did not know the deceased. *Rav Schwab* was asked to deliver the eulogy. He did not say much, but what he did say reverberated throughout the assembled few.

"I knew this man for only one day," he began. "I do not know what his life was like. One thing, however, I do know: He did *teshuvah* before he died. Furthermore, I never saw a person do *teshuvah* with such sincerity."

*Ad yom moso techakeh lo, im yishuv miyad tikablo*, "Until the day of his death, You wait for him (to repent). If he repents (before he dies), You immediately accept him." Hashem waits for us to repent, because He knows that deep down it was not our intention to act maliciously. So, He waits. If we come through with the *teshuvah*, Hashem expunges the sin as if it had never taken place.