

It will say on that day “Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?” (31:17)

One would think that *Klal Yisrael's* acknowledgment of the sins which catalyzed Hashem's wrath should be considered a sort of *teshuvah*, repentance. If so, why does it not inspire a reciprocal merciful response from Hashem – instead of continued concealment? Indeed, *hester Panim*, concealment of Hashem's countenance, is a harsh punishment. What could be worse than being ignored by the Almighty?

Ramban points out that, although the *pasuk* indicates feelings of introspection and an acknowledgment of shortcomings, it does not represent complete *teshuvah*. One is definitely on the correct road to repentance, but he is not yet there – not by a long shot. This is a remarkable statement. Perhaps it might even be too demanding. What more is expected of a person than acknowledgment of sin and concession of guilt? The individual is the recipient of Hashem's punishment, and he owns up to it, saying that – yes – I deserve this. I acted inappropriately. I am guilty of wrongdoing. Is this not *teshuvah*?

Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, explains that *teshuvah* denotes much more than a recognition of sin. The realization that his behavior has created a breach in his relationship with Hashem, distancing him from the Source of all life, coupled with his decision to refrain from any idolatrous behavior, should be the clincher. Yet, it is not. This step is only the beginning. It represents a break with the past, cutting himself off from his idolatrous behavior. Until he returns completely and totally to Hashem, however, he has only begun the journey. He has gone part of the way, perhaps the most difficult part of the trip – but he is still not there.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* quotes the *Navi Hoshea*, “*Shuvah Yisrael ad Hashem Elohecha, ki kashalta ba'Avonecha*. “Return O' Yisrael to Hashem, your G-d, for you have stumbled in your sins.” Although we may have acknowledged that we have stumbled and that Hashem is sovereign, we still must continue our return until we return to Hashem.

V'hachazierinu bi'seshuvah sheleimah lefanecha, “And return us with a complete repentance before You.” Until we reach the point that we have actually returned to Hashem, our *teshuvah* cannot be considered complete. We cannot have it both ways. Acknowledging that one has sinned, but not doing anything about it, impugns the integrity of the *teshuvah*. If you are so troubled regarding your sinful behavior, then you must return completely to Hashem. Partial return, a “u” turn, so to speak, does not make one a *baal teshuvah*, penitent. One either goes all of the way, or he remains a spiritual cripple.