

And you will ponder in your heart... and you shall return unto Hashem your G-d. (30:1,2)

When things do not seem to go your way, you see more curse than blessing -- and begin to become anxious. You finally start believing that Heaven might just be conveying a message to you – and you begin to think. *Sforno* explains the thought process and what should be coursing through your mind: “When you carefully examine and consider the conflicting aspects (of your concepts and actions) and call them all to mind, so as to distinguish truth from falsehood, then you will recognize (realize) how far you have distanced yourself from Hashem in your opinions and behavior which are contrary to His Torah.”

As a result of *Klal Yisrael's* experiences in *galus*, exile, they will, at some point, come to the stark realization that their defection from the Torah has caused their being cursed and oppressed. This will, in turn, result in some serious self-examination. The Torah calls this introspection, the “pondering of the heart,” and *Sforno* interprets it to be one’s consideration of the inner conflict that wages within him between good and evil/truth and falsehood. Man always attempts to resolve the conflict, although he is not always successful. When man realizes the folly of his ways, he will eventually repent and return to Hashem.

When one focuses on his inner conflict, the ambiguities of his life, he perceives a fresh perspective, which ideally becomes a catalyst for *teshuvah*/repentance. I would think that one should focus on the clear-cut sins, the overt errors of one’s life – not the conflicts and ambiguities. *Horav Henach Leibowitz, zl*, observes that the special prayer *Al Cheit*, which we recite on *Yom Kippur*, has the following confession: *al chet shechatanu lecha b'yodim u'blo yodim*; “I confess for the sins of which we are aware (*yodim*) and those of which we are unaware (*lo yodim*).” One would normally think that, for the most part, our sins fall under the category of *yodim*, with the minority being *lo yodim*, ones that we do not know. Thus, it would make sense that the individual who is determined to repent successfully would focus on those sins that are well-known, that are obvious. Afterwards, he can introspect and continue his search for those covert sins, which may have slipped his mind. *Sforno* implies an idea entirely different from this hypothesis. He intimates that one must first and foremost focus on his inner conflict and ambiguous, sinful behavior, in order to understand: his vested interests; his proclivities; and his internal struggle between right and wrong, truth and falsehood. Indeed, implicative from his exposition is the notion that the majority of one’s sins are indeed *lo yodim*. Only after one has come to grips with his internal struggles, his feelings concerning right and wrong, and his reactions based upon his personal proclivities, can he begin to understand the reason that he is distant from Hashem.

To put it in simple terms (I think): It is not necessarily what one does, but rather: why he does it; what provokes him; what his personal failings are, all of which determine his gravitation toward sin. This is a powerful observation, because one is hard-pressed to address sin and the best approach to *teshuvah* until he is acutely aware of the factors which contribute to his sin.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* notes a second lesson to be derived from *Sforno*. It is possible to have a window to peer through at the inner workings of our psyche. Our subconscious (according to *Sforno*) is not a closed door which is impossible for us to penetrate personally. Even when a person is within the grips of sin, under the influence of passion and uncontrolled desire, he can still introspect and search within himself to understand and reflect upon his tendencies that affect his subconscious. *Sforno's* position, however, does not seem to coincide with Shlomo *Hamelech's* comment in *Mishlei* 21:2, *Kol derech ish yashar b'ainav v'shochein libos Hashem*; "A man's every way is upright in his eyes, but Hashem resides within his heart." *Rabbeinu Yonah* explains that a person's *middos*, character traits, and his nature are straight in his own eyes. He sees nothing questionable or wrong with himself, because he is unable to see beyond his personal vested interests. How then can a person repair/correct himself, his *middos*, to make them consistent with Hashem's demands of us? Hashem helps him. Hashem grants him the help that he needs. He must, however, make use of this assistance. In any event, we see that man cannot do it alone. His *middos* are stronger than he is. How then are we to understand *Sforno*?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that two forms of vested interest are imbedded in our subconscious. Some are buried so deep that we are unable to unearth them without Hashem, but Hashem is present, and He does help. For others, we are able to do it alone, to introspect and see what it is that is causing us to make the wrong turn – all of the time.