

It will be when all these things come upon you...then you will take it unto your heart...and you will return unto Hashem... Hashem...will place all these curses upon your enemies...and you shall return... When you will listen to Hashem your G-D...when you shall return to Hashem your G-D, with all your heart and all your soul. (30:1-2,7-8,10)

Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl, infers three levels of teshuvah, repentance, from the sequence of the pesukim. The lowest rung on the ladder of repentance is the teshuvah that emerges as a result of experiencing punishment. After all, you do not find many non-believers in the hospital! The pain has begun; the punishment is imminent. The reality of his wrong-doing is readily apparent. Indeed, only the obstinate and arrogant will continue to refrain from performing teshuvah. "It will be when all these things come upon you," as it begins to hurt - it is now efficacious to perform teshuvah. The middle level is the teshuvah that surfaces when one witnesses the downfall of others, be it his enemies or even his friends. Obviously, this person deserves credit for his realization that what is occurring "next door" is likely to happen to him. He notices that "Hashem...will place all these curses upon your enemies...", and his eyes open to the message before him.

The highest and most desirable level of teshuvah is represented by he who "will listen to Hashem...and...return...with all your heart and all your soul." This individual does not wait for the punishment to begin; he acts immediately - as soon as he realizes that he erred. He reflects that "perhaps" he has not lived his life in accordance with the standard set forth by Hashem. This awareness catalyzes an immediate adjustment, followed by repentance. How fortunate is he who has the insight to circumvent punishment.