

And you will return unto Hashem, your G-d. (30:2)

Teshuvah should address three concepts: the sin; the sinner and before whom/or to whom one has sinned. The *Nesivos Shalom* explains the words, *Atem nitzavim hayom... lifnei Hashem Elokeichem*, "You stand here today... before Hashem, your G-d." Remember before Whom you have sinned, and repent accordingly. *Teshuvah* which addresses a sin committed to a human being will not cut it. It is insufficient until one takes to heart that he has also sinned before *Hashem Yisborach*. He must consider who he is, his spiritual stature, his failings, but also his incredible potential, and how this sin affects who he is and what he could become. He must then delve deeply into his actions, to confront intelligently what motivated his sinful behavior and how to prevent it from recurring. He must look at the pathological precursor to his actions, what personal failing provoked such errant behavior.

One of the greatest roadblocks to *teshuvah* is sin mitigation, whereby we convince/delude ourselves into believing that what we did was really not that bad. After a while, we might even believe that it was a *mitzvah*. If a person really wants to mend his ways, he must be upfront with himself and candidly accept the fact that he acted inappropriately. If he acts dishonestly and evades the truth, he will not effectively commit to *teshuvah*, because in his mind he did nothing wrong. These are just some of the many hurdles one who seeks to return must overcome. So, how does one overcome the challenges to *teshuvah*? First and foremost, he must believe he cannot and does not do it alone. When Hashem sees his sincerity, He will help. The inner-strength that we develop through our efforts is coupled with Divine aid. The rule to live by concerning *teshuvah* is, *Pischu Li pesach k'chudo shel machat v'Ani eftach lachem pesach k'chudo shel ulam*, "Open for Me a hole like the eye of a needle, and I will open for you (the rest) like the entrance way to a great hall" (*Midrash Shir HaShirim* 5:2). Hashem is telling us that He does not expect us to do the whole job ourselves. He does expect us to make the breakthrough, to create the needle hole. There is one condition, however: the hole must penetrate to the other side. The resolutions that we accept upon ourselves must be sincere and ones that we are definitely capable of seeing to fruition. We should focus on the small areas of our lives that require adjustment, the ones that we know that we can develop.

The *Bostoner Rebbe*, *zl*, relates a powerful parable that goes to the crux of the problem of why some Jews seek (what they think are) greener pastures in the secular approach to religion. The parable also addresses the sad consequences of their decision. A large tree was blooming, its leaves enjoying the nourishment provided by the tree's roots. They also loved the marvelous view from way up. Thus, they fluttered cheerfully all day in the breeze. One day, some sparrows came by and perched themselves on a branch. Some of the leaves began to reconsider their lot, seeing how these birds were able to soar through the sky unimpeded, while they were stuck all day on the tree. They, too, wanted to fly off free as a bird.

The jealousy that the leaves had for the sparrows mounted daily, until one day a storm came, accompanied by a powerful wind that swept those very leaves off the tree into the air. How happy

they now were. They could fly; they could soar; no longer were they stuck, restricted to the tree. This was true life!

When the wind stopped blowing, however, the leaves fell victim to gravity as they plummeted to the ground. There they lay helpless, stuck in the mud, never to rise again. "So, too," says the *Rebbe*, "those who abandon our tradition, with all of its restraints and supports, can now fly high "like everyone else." Unfortunately, to their later chagrin, it does not last very long. Enduring spiritual heights are achieved only by remaining attached to the Tree of Life."