

PITTED PENITENCE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

A man or a woman who commits any of Man's sins...they shall confess their sin that they committed; he shall make restitution for his guilt through its principal value...

Be'er Mayim Chaim: Our mussar teaches clarified for us that when a person performs vidui for a particular transgression, he must also confess all prior sins. Because the effects of aveiros cling to us, all previous transgressions must be confessed, in an attempt to deal with their aftermath. Consequently, all prior aveiros that impact his neshamah are his concern, going back as far as the time that his neshamah was included in the great soul of Adam ha-Rishon. Our pasuk alludes to this. You can read it as *veheishiv/ he shall do teshuvah es ashamo/ for his trespass berosho/ at its source, back at its beginning.*

This approach will illuminate a puzzling maamar Chazal.² Commenting on Reuven's return to the pit into which his brothers had cast Yosef, they praise him for being the first in regard to teshuvah. As a consequence, one of his descendants - Hoshea - would also be first in regard to teshuvah, as seen in the pasuk, "Shuvah Yisroel."³ But was Reuven really first? Chazal tell us of the teshuvah of Adam ha-Rishon and of Kayin. And what was Hoshea's contribution? He was hardly the first to instruct us about what rishonim count as one of the 248 affirmative mitzvos of the Torah!

We can explain that Chazal picked up on the Torah's describing Reuven as returning "to the bor/pit."

⁴ Given our familiarity with where the shevatim had cast Yosef, the Torah could just as well have stated that Reuven returned - and nothing more. By underscoring "to the pit," the Torah alludes to the primordial pit dug by Adam ha-Rishon by his first sin. This deep pit became a hazard in the great public thoroughfare, into which fell great neshamos.

The consequences parallel the Torah's treatment of a person who creates a public hazard in tort law.⁵ The responsible party for the bor must make restitution. He must pay kesef, meaning that he must make restitution for the kisufa, the shame of all the neshamos that no longer can look at the Countenance of their Heavenly Father. He keeps the carcass, meaning that he is now burdened with the task of rehabilitating all the souls that have been damaged by this bor. (Like Yosef's, it appears to be empty, but is populated by dangerous entities - in Yosef's case, snakes and scorpions; in the global sense, the kelipos that rush in wherever a spiritual void allows them entrance. These kelipos so fiercely attack the ensnared neshamos, that the latter are considered as dead, relative to the

vitality of a kelipah-free existence.) The party responsible for the bor now becomes obligated to make restitution, i.e. to return those neshamos to the lap of their Father. The owner of the animal is charged, however, with the task of dealing with the carcass. In other words, no success of the bor-owner in reuniting the neshamos with their Source is possible without Hashem's assistance. Human effort does not accomplish what it sets out to accomplish unless it is carried on Divine shoulders.

Reuven realized all this when he returned to the pit and found it empty. The visual image struck him forcefully; the primordial pit of Adam's chet stood before him with a yawning chasm. He realized that for his own teshuvah (in the episode of his father's beds) to be effective, it was his responsibility to bring back Yosef from the physical pit in front of him - and he couldn't.

HKBH took note of Reuven's frustration, and credited him with a great accomplishment. Reuven added a new dimension to teshuvah. He comprehended that teshuvah must reach back to the source of all of our aveiros- the chet of Adam HaRishon. In recognition, Reuven's descendant Hoshea, who wrote, "Repent, Yisrael, for you have stumbled in your aveirah." He meant that the aveirah of the past has caused you to stumble now. You must repent for both. He, too, understood this great principle.

Sources:

1. Based on Be'er Mayim Chaim, Bamidbar 5:6-7
 2. Yalkut Shimoni , Trei Asar 516
 3. Hoshea 14:2
 4. Bereishis 37:29
 5. Shemos 21:33-34
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