

SICHA SUMMARY

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 34

Aseres Yemei Teshuva

The Rambam:

In his laws of Teshuva, Rambam describes the unique character and power of the ten days from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur:

“Even though repentance and calling out to God are desirable at all times, during the ten days between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, they are even more desirable and will be accepted immediately as the verse states: ‘Seek God when He is to be found.’” (Yeshayahu 55:6) (Hilchos Teshuva, 2:6)

The Question:

How is the importance and “desirability,” in the Rambam’s phrasing, of teshuva alluded to in this verse specifically? Seeking G-d can take any number of forms — prayer, Torah study, kindness — why does Rambam cite it as a proof-text for the value of teshuva?

The Explanation:

The verse Rambam cites in full reads, “Seek G-d when He is found, call Him when He is

near.” The repetition in the verse can be explained as poetic license, but from the deeper perspective of chassidus, there must be precision and meaning in each phrase the Torah employs. The two halves of the verse are alluding to two different ways that G-d is available to us, and two mirroring responses from us toward G-d.

When we say something is “found” it implies that we did not seek the object or pursue it. The thing presented itself to us without our preparation, participation, or intention. When G-d is described as being “found” by human beings, that means that even though the person has not sought after G-d, has not consciously pursued G-d, still, G-d is “found” and available to him. This is because of G-d’s immutable love for every Jew as a parent loves their child. Even if the child does not seek a relationship with the parent, the parent’s love endures, and they remain available for the child.

Thus, this person is in a state of distance which requires teshuva. G-d is there waiting for him, but he must draw near. The response of the person to this realization

must be “seek G-d;” the word *dirshu*, seek, implies a concerted effort to attain something that one desires. When we learn that even though we have forgotten G-d, He is still “found” and present, then we are moved to seek Him intensely.

Even if G-d is “found,” since His love, like a father’s, endures forever, that does not necessarily mean that G-d’s love is revealed and palpable. Maybe G-d is available and open, but His love is not close and felt to the person who is distant. The verse therefore continues, “call Him when He is near.” G-d is not just “found,” He is also “near;” His love is open and close to us. This elicits the response of “call Him.” Calling means to speak out and disclose our private thoughts and yearnings. Because G-d is “near,” we do not just seek G-d urgently from the core of our being, but we also “call” out our yearning.

Far From Earth

Parshas Haazinu is often read during the Ten Days of Teshuva, and so there must be an allusion to these concepts within the parshah as well. In the opening verse, Moshe calls on the “heavens” to “listen” and for the “earth [to] hear the words of my mouth.” In Hebrew, the word for “listen”

implies closeness and proximity, the word for “hear” implies distance. The Midrash therefore notes that Moshe was close to Heaven and spirituality (listen) and distant from earthy materialism (hear).

The Alter Rebbe explains that in this verse, heaven refers to Torah and earth to mitzvos. But how can Moshe be described as being “distant” from earth/mitzvos?

Distant in this context is not a pejorative, but another form of relating to something important. Close means that the thing resonates with you; distant means that your connection with the thing is founded on your fealty to the entity, not on your intellectual appreciation of it. Moshe is “close” to Torah, because Torah is Divine wisdom made accessible to the human mind. But he is “distant” from mitzvos because he does not understand how they bind one to G-d, we perform them out of submission to G-d. This corresponds to the two forms of teshuva alluded to in the verse cited by Rambam — “Seek G-d when He is found,” this is the love of G-d that we do not feel intimately (mitzvos), and “call Him when He is near,” the revealed love that is felt (Torah).
