

# The Promise of Teshuva

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In Devarim, the Torah gives an account of *Am Yisrael's* repentance and ultimate return to Hashem. This section, which is also known as *parshat hateshuva*, concludes an account of the blessings and curses that will befall the Jewish people if they should stray from Him.

1. And it will be, when all these things come upon you the blessing and the curse which I have set before you that you will consider in your heart, among all the nations where the Lord your God has banished you, 2. and you will return to the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and you will listen to His voice according to all that I am commanding you this day you and your children, 3. then, the Lord, your God, will bring back your exiles, and He will have mercy upon you. He will once again gather you from all the nations, where the Lord, your God, had dispersed you. 4. Even if your exiles are at the end of the heavens, the Lord, your God, will gather you from there, and He will take you from there. 5. And the Lord, your God, will bring you to the land which your forefathers possessed, and you [too] will take possession of it, and He will do good to you, and He will make you more numerous than your forefathers. 6. And the Lord, your God, will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, [so that you may] love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, for the sake of your life. 7. And the Lord, your God, will place all these curses upon your enemies and upon your adversaries, who pursued you. 8. And you will return and listen to the voice of the Lord, and fulfill all His commandments, which I command you this day. 9. And the Lord, your God, will make you abundant for good in all the work of your hands, in the fruit of your womb, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your soil. For the Lord will once again rejoice over you for good, as He rejoiced over your forefathers, 10. when you obey the Lord, your God, to observe His commandments and His statutes written in this Torah scroll, [and] when you return to the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul. 11. For this commandment which I command you this day, is not concealed from you, nor is it far away. 12. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us and fetch it for us, to tell [it] to

א והיה כי יבאו עליך כל הדברים האלה הברכה והקללה אשר נתתי לפניך והשבת אל לבבך בכל הגוים אשר הדיחך ה' אלהיך שמה: ב ושבת עד ה' אלהיך ושמעת בקלו ככל אשר אנכי מצוך היום אתה ובניך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך: ג ושב ה' אלהיך את שבותך ורחמך ושב וקבצך מכל העמים אשר הפיצך ה' אלהיך שמה: ד אם יהיה נדחך בקצה השמים משם יקבצך ה' אלהיך ומשם יקחך: ה והביאך ה' אלהיך אל הארץ אשר ירשו אבותיך וירשתה והיטבך והרביך מאבתיך: ו ומל ה' אלהיך את לבבך ואת לבב זרעך לאהבה את ה' אלהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך למען חיידך: ז ונתן ה' אלהיך את כל האלות האלה על איביך ועל שנאיך אשר רדפוך: ח ואתה תשוב ושמעת בקול ה' ועשית את כל מצותיו אשר אנכי מצוך היום: ט והותירך ה' אלהיך בכל מעשה ידך בפרי בטנך ובפרי בהמתך ובפרי אדמתך לטבה כי ישוב ה' לשוב עליך לטוב כאשר שש על אבתך: י כי תשמע בקול ה' אלהיך לשמר מצותיו וחקתיו הכתובה בספר התורה הזה כי תשוב אל ה' אלהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך: יא כי המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוך היום לא נפלאה היא ולא רחוקה היא: יב לא בשמים היא לאמר מי יעלה לנו השמימה ויקחה לנו

us, so that we can fulfill it?" 13. Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us and fetch it for us, to tell [it] to us, so that we can fulfill it?" 14. Rather, [this] thing is very close to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can fulfill it.

**Devarim 30:1-14**

וישמענו אתה ונעשנה: יג ולא מעבר לים הוא לאמר מי יעבר לנו אל עבר הים ויקחה לנו וישמענו אתה ונעשנה: יד כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיך ובלבבך לעשתו: דברים ל:א-יד

In saying, *v'shav Hashem Elokechah et shevutcha*, God will return your captives from wherever they have been scattered, and *umal Hashem et l'vavchah v'et l'vav zar'echah l'ahavah et Hashem Elokechah*, and God will circumcise your heart so that you may love Him, the Torah tells us that when the Jewish people do ultimately return to God, He in turn, will return the Jewish people and the ultimate redemption, both physical and spiritual, will occur.

Since the Torah presents the ultimate redemption as a consequence of teshuvah, it seems that teshuvah is therefore a prerequisite for redemption. Indeed, both Ibn Ezra and Ramban point out, based on this perek, that redemption is dependent on repentance.<sup>23</sup> Understanding the teshuvah described in this perek will guide us in performing the mitzvah of teshuvah, which is so prominent during the months of Elul and Tishrei.

Based on the pesukim in the parshah, particularly pesukim 2, 8 and 10, teshuvah sounds like a recommitment to following God's command, demonstrated by keeping Torah and mitzvot: *v'shavta ad Hashem Elokecha v'shamata b'kolo*, and you shall return to God and listen to his voice. The Rambam elaborates on the performance of teshuvah:

*What constitutes Teshuvah? That a sinner should abandon his sins and remove them from his thoughts, resolving in his heart, never to commit them again... Similarly, he must regret the past... He must verbally confess and state these matters which he resolved in his heart.*

**Rambam Hilchot Teshuva 2:2**

ומה היא התשובה הוא שיעזוב החוטא חטאו ויסירו ממחשבתו ויגמור בלבו שלא יעשהו עוד... וכן יתנחם על שעבר... וצריך להתודות בשפתיו ולומר עניינות אלו שגמר בלבו. רמב"ם הלכות תשובה ב:ב

Rambam explains that real teshuvah must include not only abandoning one's sins and returning to follow the mitzvot of God, but also removing any thought of sinning from one's mind, committing oneself not to sin again and regretting the sins which one has already committed. Teshuvah, therefore, includes not only observable action but an emotional commitment to God as well, as it says in pesukim 2 and 10 that you shall "return to the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul". The Rambam also adds two additional components to teshuvah not found in our pesukim: viduy, verbal confession, and a declaration of this new commitment.

Later the Rambam tells us of God's perspective vis-à-vis one who sincerely returns to Him:

*Teshuvah is great for it draws a man close to the Shechinah... implied is that if you will return in teshuvah,*

גדולה תשובה שמקרבת את האדם לשכינה... כלומר אם תחזור בתשובה בי

<sup>23</sup> See Ibn Ezra Devarim 29:28 and Ramban Devarim 26:16 referring to chapter 30

*you will cling to Me. Teshuvah brings near those who were far removed. Previously, this person was hated by God, disgusting, far removed, and abominable. Now, he is beloved and desirable, close, and dear.*

**Rambam Hilchot Teshuvah 7:6**

תדבק, התשובה מקרבת את הרחוקים, אמש היה זה שנאוי לפני המקום משוקץ ומרוחק ותועבה, והיום הוא אהוב ונחמד קרוב וידיד.  
רמב"ם הלכות תשובה ז:ו

Doing teshuvah erases a person's sins to the point where God considers it as if they had never occurred in the first place. As a result of the process of teshuvah, he becomes even closer to Hashem than he had been before the sin. It brings the person *ad Hashem*, literally to God.

We have seen that teshuvah involves a wholehearted return to God in thought, emotion and action, and if done sincerely, it brings physical and spiritual redemption to the individual or community who has genuinely completed the process. Still, the mepharshim disagree as to how to understand the implications of this parshah. Some maintain that the Torah's declaration of *v'shavta ad Hashem Elokechah*, and you will return unto your God, and the description of redemption that follows, represents a prediction or promise of what will occur in the future. However, others maintain that this is a mitzvah, a command to return to God in order to bring about the ultimate redemption.

These differing approaches are reflected in the mepharshim's understanding of pesukim 11-14. Viewing these pesukim as either a continuation of the perek which describes teshuvah or as referring to what was mentioned only in the previous verse, the entire Torah, determines how teshuvah is understood in this context.

The Ramban is among those who are of the opinion that pesukim 11-14 are indeed a continuation of the perek. He maintains that the words *ki hamitzvah hazot*, for this **mitzvah**, are referring to teshuvah, implying that the beginning of the perek is talking about a command to return to God.

*"this mitzvah", is referring to teshuva, "you will consider in your heart" and "you will return to the Lord, your God" is a mitzvah that we are commanded to do. It is written as a statement (and not as an imperative) as a promise that in the future it will be so.*

**Ramban Devarim 30:11**

"המצוה הזאת" על התשובה הנזכרת, כי והשבות אל לבבך (בפסוק א) ושבת עד ה' אלהיך (בפסוק ב) מצוה שיצוה אותנו לעשות כן. ונאמרה בלשון הבינוני לרמוז בהבטחה כי עתיד הדבר להיות כן.  
רמב"ן דברים ל:יא

Ramban explains that the reason the mitzvah is expressed as a statement, even though it is an imperative, is that after providing a description of the terrible things that will befall the Jewish people, God wanted to assure *Am Yisrael* that they will do teshuvah and merit the ultimate redemption in the future. Thus, the teshuvah described here is both a mitzvah and a promise.

Other commentators, however, do not see pesukim 11-14 as a reference to teshuvah. For example, Rashi seems to maintain that the words *mitzvah hazot*, this commandment, are referring to the whole Torah.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> This is clear from his explanation of the words *lo bashamayim hi*, it is not in the heavens, as referring to the Torah: (יב) לא בשמים היא: שאלו היתה בשמים היית צריך לעלות אחריה וללומדה. (יד) כי קרוב אליך: התורה נתנה לכם בכתב ובעל פה:

If the expression *mitzvah hazot* is not referring specifically to the mitzvah of teshuvah, we are not compelled to explain that the beginning of the perek is describing a mitzvah, but rather only a promise for future times. This is in fact the opinion of the Rambam:

*All the prophets commanded [the people] to repent. Israel will only be redeemed through teshuvah. The Torah has already promised that, ultimately, Israel will repent towards the end of her exile and, immediately, she will be redeemed as [Deuteronomy 30:1-3] states: "There shall come a time when [you will experience] all these things... and you will return to God, your Lord.... God, your Lord, will bring back your [captivity]."*  
**Rambam Hilchot Teshuvah 7:5<sup>25</sup>**

כל הנביאים כולן צוו על התשובה ואין ישראל נגאלין אלא בתשובה וכבר הבטיחה תורה שסוף ישראל לעשות תשובה בסוף גלותן ומיד הן נגאלין שנאמר והיה כי יבאו עליך כל הדברים וגו' ושבת עד ה' אלהיך ושב ה' אלהיך וגו'.  
**רמב"ם הלכות תשובה ז:ה**

The Rambam says that we have been commanded to do teshuvah, and that teshuvah is a prerequisite for redemption. However, he does not see our perek as an expression of that command. Rather, he sees it as an assurance that in the future *Am Yisrael* will return to God and that he will redeem us.

If perek 30 is not the source for the mitzvah of teshuvah according to the Rambam, what then is the source? The Rambam writes in

*If a person transgresses any of the mitzvot of the Torah, whether a positive command or a negative command - whether willingly or inadvertently - when he repents, and returns from his sin, he must confess before God, blessed be, He as [Numbers 5:6-7] states: "If a man or a woman commit any of the sins of man... they must confess the sin that they committed." This refers to a verbal confession. This confession is a positive command.*  
**Rambam Hilchot Teshuvah 1:1**

כל מצות שבתורה בין עשה בין לא תעשה אם עבר אדם על אחת מהן בין בזדון בין בשגגה כשיעשה תשובה וישוב מחטאו חייב להתודות לפני הא-ל ברוך הוא שנאמר איש או אשה כי יעשו וגו' והתודו את חטאתם אשר עשו זה וידוי דברים, וידוי זה מצות עשה...  
**רמב"ם הלכות תשובה א:א**

The Rambam draws from the the pesukim in Bamidbar perek 5 which discuss the process of bringing a *korban chatat*, a sin offering.

*Tell the children of Israel: When a man or woman commits any of the sins against man to act treacherously against God, and that person is [found] guilty: they shall confess the sin they committed...*  
**Bamidbar 5:6-7**

איש או אשה כי יעשו מכל חטאת האדם למעל מעל בה' ואשמה הנפש ההוא: והתודו את חטאתם אשר עשו  
**במדבר ה:ו-ז**

In addition to bringing an offering, one who has sinned must also make a verbal confession. The Rambam sees this requirement for verbal confession as the source of the mitzvah. Based on the wording of the Rambam, however, the nature of the mitzvah is somewhat unclear.

<sup>25</sup> See also *Hilchot Melachim* 11:1

We mentioned earlier that in *Hilchot Teshuvah* 7:5 the Rambam says that we have been commanded by the prophets to do teshuvah. Additionally, he writes:

*This text describes one mitzvah; that a sinner should repent from his sin before God and confess.*

**Rambam Header to Hilchot Teshuva**

מצות עשה אחת, והוא שישוב החוטא מחטאו לפני ה' ויתודה.

**רמב"ם כותרת להלכות תשובה**

The implication of these two sources is that there is a mitzvah for a person to do teshuvah and viduy. When describing the mitzvah in *Hilchot Teshuvah* 1:1, however, Rambam writes *k'sheya'aseh teshuvah... chayav l'hitvadot*, when one does teshuvah he must confess. This seems to imply that the Torah's commandment is to do viduy and that teshuvah itself is not an obligation. In fact, the Rambam concludes the statement by saying that *viduy zeh mitzvat ase*, this **viduy** is a positive precept. But what about teshuvah? Isn't that a *mitzvat ase* as well? Is it only an option? Are teshuvah and viduy one and the same? How can the Rambam be understood?

The Rambam's description of the mitzvah in his *Sefer Hamitzvot*, his list of mitzvot with a brief description of the nature of each, is equally ambiguous:

*The 73<sup>rd</sup> mitzvah is that which we have been commanded to confess the sins and transgressions that we have committed before God, and to say it along with teshuvah.*

*And this is viduy... It has been explained based on what we have said, that viduy is a mitzvah in and of itself and is an obligation upon every sinner for every sin he has committed*

**Rambam Sefer HaMitzvot Aseh #73**

והמצוה העג' היא שצונו להתודות על החטאים והעונות שחטאנו לפני הקל יתעלה ולאמר אותם עם התשובה. וזה הוא הודוי... הגה התבאר לך מכל מה שזכרנוהו שהודוי מצוה בפני עצמה וחובה לחוטא על אי זה חטא שחטא  
**ספר המצוות לרמב"ם מצות עשה עג**

He tells us that there is a mitzvah of viduy which must accompany the act of teshuvah. It again remains unclear if teshuvah itself is a mitzvah. In the *Moreh Nevuchim*, the Guide for the Perplexed, however, the Rambam once again refers to teshuvah as a mitzvah:

*The first class comprises those precepts which form fundamental principles, such as we have enumerated in Hilchot yesode ha-torah. Repentance and fasts belong also to this class, as will be shown.*

**Moreh Nevuchim 3:35**

הכלל הראשון כולל המצות אשר הם דעות שרשיות, והם אשר ספרנום בהלכות יסודי התורה, ומן הכלל הזה עוד התשובה והתעניות כמו שאבאר  
**מורה נבוכים ג:לה**

Many suggestions are given for understanding the opinion of the Rambam. The *Sefer Hachinuch* elaborates on the mitzvah as described by the Rambam in מצוה שסד, mitzvah 364. He calls the mitzvah *mitzvat viduy al hachet*, the commandment of confession over sins, and not the commandment of repentance over sins. In his comments on the *Sefer Hachinuch*, Rabbi Yosef Ben Moshe Babad explains that because the Rambam uses the expression *k'sheya'aseh teshuvah... chayav l'hitvadot*, the Rambam indeed maintains that teshuvah is not obligatory, and that the *mitzvat ase* is to do viduy if one chooses to do to teshuvah:

From the words of the Rambam it is clear that Teshuva is not a positive commandment, because he did not write "there is a commandment to do Teshuva." Rather, if one chooses to do teshuvah, he must confess verbally.

**Minchat Chinuch Mitzvah 364**

מדברי הרמב"ם... מבואר בדבריו דאין התשובה מצות עשה, דלא כתב מצות עשה שיעשה תשובה, רק אם בא לעשות, מצות עשה שיתודה בפיו...  
**מנחת חינוך מצוה שסד**

Understanding the Rambam in this way would mean that there is a fundamental *machloket*, disagreement, between the Rambam and the Ramban, who says that there is a mitzvah to do teshuvah based on Devarim perek 30. This understanding also explains why the source that the Rambam gives for the mitzvah is a pasuk about viduy and not about teshuvah.

The *Minchat Chinuch's* reading of the Rambam, however, is not universal. Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, for example, provides a different explanation of the Rambam:

*How can we consider returning from one's foolishness and ceasing to sin, as implied by the name teshuvah [return], a mitzvah? The command that warns a person not to sin in the first place is the very same command which should prevent him from sinning even after he sins! This is also what the Rambam writes in Hilchot Teshuva (chapter 1): When a person does Teshuvah and returns from his sin [meaning he refrains from sinning because of the command which he has been commanded not to violate any, mitzvah positive or negative, which was in effect even before he sinned], he must confess before God, as it says "they shall confess," but regarding teshuvah itself it is not considered a new mitzvah...*

**Meshech Chochmah Devarim 31:17**

דשם תשובה כפי מה שמורה שמה איך נחשבת למצוה שישוב מכסלו ולא יחטא עוד... הנה האזהרה הראשונה המונעתו מחטוא טרם שחטא היא מונעתו מחטוא גם אחרי שחטא... וכן הוא לשון רבינו בהלכות תשובה (רפ"א) כשיעשה תשובה וישוב מחטאו [פירוש לבלי לחטוא מחמת הצווי שהוא מצווה שלא לעבור בפעם ראשון קודם שחטא בין מ"ע בן מל"ת] חייב להתודות לפני השי"ת שנאמר כו' והתודו כו'... אבל על התשובה בעצמה אין לחשבה למצוה חדשה...  
**משך חכמה דברים לא:יז**

The *Meshech Chochmah* asks how doing teshuvah, returning to God, could be considered a mitzvah, since not sinning is just doing what is expected of us. He concludes, therefore, that the mitzvah must involve something more than a return to God. The mitzvah itself is viduy, declaring that you did wrong, requesting *kapparah*, forgiveness, for your sins and saying wholeheartedly that you will not sin again. In other words, when the Rambam says *k'sheya'aseh teshuvah... chayav l'hitvadot*, he did not mean that there is an option to do teshuvah which, if chosen, necessitates a verbal confession. Rather, teshuvah is expected, even required, as part of the obligation to follow Torah and mitzvot and when one is ready to return to God there is a mitzvah, to do viduy.

Both the *Minchat Chinuch* and the *Meshech Chochmah* understand the Rambam as saying that there is no mitzvah per se to do teshuvah, rather the mitzvah is viduy. What they do not explain is why the Rambam seems to call teshuvah a mitzvah in a number of places as indicated above.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik offers a third understanding of the Rambam in his teshuvah lectures recorded in *Al Hateshuvah*<sup>26</sup>. He believes emphatically that according to the Rambam there is a mitzvah to do teshuvah, as Rambam seems to indicate. This mitzvah falls under the category of mitzvot in which the actions of the mitzvah and the actual fulfillment of the mitzvah are distinct. Teshuvah, he explains, is an emotional state. Feeling sincere regret and a renewed commitment to God are difficult to command someone to do, since it is difficult to command someone to have certain emotions or feelings. When the Torah wants us to achieve a certain emotional state it provides us with a formula, a physical act, which will lead to the intended emotions. In the case of teshuvah, the action that leads to the emotional state, the real fulfillment of the mitzvah, is viduy. According to Rabbi Soloveitchik, this distinction explains the discrepancy in the heading of *Hilchot Teshuvah* in which he calls teshuvah a mitzvah, and 1:1 where he implies that the mitzvah is viduy. He proves from the mitzvah of *tefillah*, prayer, that with regard to this type of mitzvah the Rambam mentions the actual mitzvah in the heading, and then describes the details and actions in the halachot themselves.

Rabbi Soloveitchik further explains<sup>27</sup> why the Torah requires a person to say viduy even if he already has sincere feelings of regret and renewed commitment: as long as one has not concretized his feelings by expressing them out loud, they do not exist in a real way. If they are kept inside, one can change his mind or pretend it never happened. Even sincere feelings are not real until they are articulated and brought out into the open.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the Torah requires each individual and community to make a verbal confession, thereby ingraining the thoughts into our hearts.

While the Rambam's opinion on teshuvah is open to interpretation, the significant role that viduy plays is not. Whether viduy itself is a mitzvah or whether it is the physical action which leads to the emotional fulfillment of the mitzvah, viduy and teshuvah are part of one package.

The Ramban, however, seems to take a different approach to these two ideas. He sees teshuvah and viduy as distinct and independent of each other,<sup>29</sup> as he implies in his commentary on Vayikra chapter 26, the first description of the *k'lalot*, the curses, in the Torah. As opposed to our pesukim in *parshat hateshuvah*, which say that after the curses are tragically realized the Jewish people will return to God, *v'shavta ad Hashem Elokechah*, in Vayikra the word teshuvah, return, is not mentioned. Rather, the expression used is: *v'hitvadu et avonam v'et avon avotam* (26:40), that *Am Yisrael* will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers.

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<sup>26</sup> See *Al Hateshuvah* pages 40-45

<sup>27</sup> *Al Hateshuvah* pages 61-62

<sup>28</sup> While the Rambam himself might not think that Devarim 30:11-14 are referring to teshuvah, this idea of Rabbi Soloveitchik, that speaking out loud causes firm feeling in one's heart, fits nicely with the words *b'fichah u'vilvavchah la'asoto*, it is in your mouth and your heart so that you can fulfill it, in pasuk 14. Teshuvah that is *b'fichah*, that you articulate, will become *bilvavcha*, ingrained in your heart. See Ramban and Seforno on 30:14 who both say that *b'fichah* is referring to viduy and *bilvavchah* to teshuvah.

<sup>29</sup> This is similar to the approach of Rabbeinu Yonah Hachasid in his book *Shaarie Teshuvah*, as understood by Rabbi Soloveitchik in *Al Hateshuvah* page 39

The Rambam might explain the difference in language by saying that they are two different expressions of the same thing, two sides of the same coin. Ramban, however, provides a different explanation.

*Know and understand that these curses are referring to the first exile... and it does not say that they will return with a complete teshuvah before Him, only that they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers (verse 40)... But the covenant in mishneh Torah (Devarim) hints to our exile and the redemption in which we will be redeemed from it. For we see that no end has been hinted at nor a time for redemption promised, rather it has been made dependent on teshuvah...*

**Ramban Vayikra 26:16**

ודע והבן כי האלות האלה ירמזו לגלות ראשון... וגם לא אמר שישובו בתשובה שלימה לפניו, רק שיתודו עונם ועון אבותם (פסוק מ)... אבל הברית שבמשנה תורה ירמז לגלותנו זה ולגאולה שנגאל ממנו. כי הסתכלנו תחילה שלא נרמז שם קץ וקצב ולא הבטיח בגאולה, רק תלה אותה בתשובה... והגאולה בברית היא השנית, גאולה שלמה מעולה על כלם.  
**רמב"ן ויקרא כו:טז**

The Ramban explains that each time the curses are mentioned in the Torah, they are referring to a different exile. The first account in Vayikra refers to, *galut Bavel*, the 70 year Babylonian exile, while the account in Devarim refers to the exile in which we still find ourselves today. There are a number of differences that exist between the first and second rendition of the *k'lalot*, which reflect the differences in the time periods they are describing. The reason the idea of teshuvah is not mentioned in Vayikra, for example, is because it is describing the first exile which did not end with complete teshuvah, and therefore did not end in complete redemption. While the Jews at the time did viduy, which the Ramban proves from verses in Daniel and other places, they did not do teshuvah, the prerequisite for *geulah sheleimah*, complete redemption. Indeed, the redemption from *galut Bavel* was not complete and many Jews remained behind. In fact, that *geulah* ended in destruction and exile.

However, in Devarim God promises us that in the future *Am Yisrael* will do complete teshuvah, which will spark the complete and ultimate redemption from the second exile in which we are still living. This is why the language of teshuvah is used the second description. In this way, the Ramban makes a distinction between teshuvah and viduy. According to his understanding, viduy can exist even without complete teshuvah.

We have seen so far what it means to do teshuvah, and that God has granted us the opportunity to repair and even improve our relationship with Him. We have learned that according to the Ramban: there is a mitzvah to do teshuvah and return wholeheartedly to God in both thought and action; at least a certain level of viduy can be done without doing complete teshuvah; complete teshuvah is a prerequisite for redemption; God promised us that at some point in the future *Am Yisrael* will fulfill this mitzvah and thus merit the *geulah sheleimah*. Rambam agrees that teshuvah is a prerequisite for redemption, but it is unclear whether or not he sees teshuvah itself as a mitzvah. Either way, he certainly believes there is a mitzvah of viduy that goes hand in hand with teshuvah and that the source for this mitzvah is the verbal confession mandated when one brings a sin offering. He believes that *parshat hateshuvah*, however, is not referring to a mitzvah, rather it is a promise that in the future a complete return to God will take place and the final redemption will follow.



In his commentary on Devarim 30, the Seforno presents an approach that combines the approaches of the Rambam and Ramban. He maintains that the perek is describing a mitzvah, an imperative, to do teshuvah, and that pesukim 11-14, *ki hamitzvah hazot*, are referring to that mitzvah. However, he sees the pesukim about viduy which accompanies the *korban chatat* as the source for the mitzvah. On the words *lo niphleit hi mimchah* and *lo rechokah hi* in pasuk 11, Seforno understands that the Torah is teaching us an important idea about teshuvah. The Torah promises us that since teshuvah is a precondition for redemption, it will always be accessible to us, even in our darkest times. Prophets and Torah scholars are not required in order to explain to us what to do and what it involved, it is always within reach.

*It is not concealed from you – that you should require prophets, nor is it far away that you should require the wise men of the generation to explain it to you in a manner that you are able to do it while you are still in exile*

לא נפלאת היא ממך. שתצטרך לנביאים. לא רחוקה היא שתצטרך לחכמי הדור הרחוקים שיפרשו לך באופן שתוכל לעשותה אפי' בעודך בגלות...

This is significant and comforting, for it means that even in times of exile and destruction, when prophecy is long gone and Torah study might not be what it once was,<sup>30</sup> we have the ability to return to God. Even when we feel very distant, God waits to take us back with open arms, to forget the past, for we are His beloved.

*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 [Isaiah 55:6] states: "Seek God when He is to be found."*

**Rambam Hilchot Teshuvah 2:6**

אע"פ שהתשובה והצעקה יפה לעולם, בעשרה הימים שבין ראש השנה ויום הכפורים היא יפה ביותר ומתקבלת היא מיד רמב"ם הלכות תשובה ב:ו

While teshuvah is always relevant, the time period of the *aseret yimei teshuvah*, the 10 days from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur, are an especially appropriate time to do teshuvah. Let us try to use this opportunity to return wholeheartedly to Hashem, as described in *parshat hateshuvah*, and thereby merit the ultimate personal and communal redemption.

<sup>30</sup> Indeed, exile is referred to as a place devoid of prophecy and Torah, as described in Eicha 2:9

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