

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Nitzavim The Limits of Divine Mercy

“When [an evildoer] hears the words of these sanctions, he may fancy himself immune, thinking, ‘I shall be safe, though I follow my own willful heart’—to the utter ruin of moist and dry alike. Hashem will never forgive him; rather, Hashem’s anger and passion will rage against that man, till every sanction recorded in this book comes down upon him, and the LORD blots out his name from under heaven.” (Devarim 29:18-19)

Rabbi Shimon Schwab (b. Frankfurt 1908, d. New York 1995) points out a strange phrase in the pasuk. The Torah describes a sinner who reacts flippantly to the grave threats of the order of curses listed in the parsha, thinking to himself that no consequences will befall him. Why is it necessary to note that “Hashem will never forgive him”? There can only be two possibilities -- either the sinner will not repent, in which case of course he will not be forgiven, or he will repent. If he repents, the rule is *ein lecha davar ha’omed befnei hateshuva*: “There is nothing that stands in the way of repentance!”

R. Schwab explains that, of course, if the sinner repents, he will be forgiven. However, generally, there is a principle which says that Hashem is *rotzeh beteshuvah* -- He awaits our repentance, mercifully withholding judgment and punishment until we do *teshuvah* of our own volition. This case is different. Someone who is fully cognizant of the severity of his sins and the dire consequences they may bring does not have the luxury of Divine patience. He is immediately liable for punishment. Nonetheless, R. Schwab is careful to note, if he repents, he will certainly still be forgiven. This is the great, redeeming power of *teshuvah*!

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Asher Coleman

