

In honor of the first yahrzeit for my mother Esther bas Eliyahu Avraham Zayin Adar 2020

Psalms 31:13

גִּשְׁפַחְתִּי כְּמֵת מִלֵּב הָיִיתִי כְּכֵלִי אֲבָד:

I am put out of mind like the dead; I am like an object given up for lost.

Psalm 119

- תַּעֲיִיתִי כְּשֶׂה אֲבָד בִּקְשׁ עַבְדְּךָ כִּי מִצְוֹתֶיךָ לֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי: 176

I have strayed like a lost sheep; search for Your servant, for I have not neglected Your commandments.

Psalm 31, “I have been forgotten.....like a lost vessel”

Psalm 119 “I have strayed.....like a lost sheep....your commandments, I have not forgotten”

In these two Psalm verses King David confesses his plight to the divine. In Ps 31 he has been away and feels ignored by his friends and in Ps 119 he confesses his having strayed from the path of the Lord. I connect the two verses because of two words they have in common: אבד *lost* and שכח *forgetting*. The first verse expresses his sense of desolation and forlorn

The supplicant of Psalm 31 bemoans the fact that his neighbors and companions treat him like an outcast. What is even more disturbing is the fact that one would expect this from the enemies, as is the case in so many laments. The friends and family who were supposed to provide the necessary support in times of affliction, however, deserted the psalmist. The line between friend and foe became blurred. The plaintiff faces rejection on two fronts: attacked by his enemies and ostracized by his friends. Through the marginalization the poet no longer features as a member of the social group that embodies his identity. Instead of being in the center, he now operates on the periphery, thus bearing the full brunt of social rejection in ancient Israel. This form of rejection is tantamount to life on the "outskirts" of society.¹

In Psalm 119 the Psalmist is open about his own personal spiritual desolation. Here the loss is an existential sense of desolation due to personal sense of guilt. The lamb has strayed from the

¹ [Basson, Alec](#), “Friends become Foes” [Verbum et Ecclesia](#), Volume 27, Number 2, 1 January 2006, pp. 398-415(18)

shepherd and begs him/Him to seek hi having lost his way. His rationale is that he has not forgotten the commandments that bind him to the shepherd.

The Talmud cites the first psalm (31) using the notion of a lost vessel/pot as a metaphor for a legal definition of ייאוש

He waits a year before giving up hope of retrieval. That year is used he in this text to claim the fact that a human being too is also forgotten after a year.

context.
Rav said: – אין המת משתכח מן הלב – A dead person is not forgotten from the heart – אלא לאחר שנים עשר חדש – except after twelve months,^[27] שנאמר – as it is stated: „נשכחתי כמת מלב היותי ככלי אבד“ – I have become forgotten as the dead from the heart, I have become like a lost vessel.^[28] The verse draws an analogy between forgetting a dead person and abandoning a lost vessel. This analogy teaches that, just as a lost vessel is abandoned by its owner after twelve months,^[29] so too a dead person is forgotten after twelve months.

Understanding the pericope of this Talmud Berachot 59a is difficult. What does the Psalmist add besides the proof-text for forgetting? If we suggest (Rashi) the intertext from Bava Metzia 28a regarding the loss of an article which is legally not recoverable after 12 months, so that the finder can take ownership, the implication is quite dark. Is a loved one really like a lost article? what has the notion of abandonment of a lost article got to do with forgetting? Does the owner really just forget the object he lost and if the passage of time allows for forgetting? what has that to do with the legal status of the ownership by the finder?

The Akeidat Yitzchak has a suggestion that moves us closer to the intent of the connection.

Akeidat Yitzchak 69:1:6

ראוי שכל ימי היותם בצער ידאגו קרוביהם עליהם ויבקשו עליהם רחמים מצורף למה שחוייב לאדם מהדאגה והעצב הימים האלה במספר כמו שאמרו בפ' הרואה אין המת משתכח מן הלב כל שנים עשר חדש מאי קראה נשכחתי כמת מלב הייתי ככלי...אובד והטעם כי כמו שהכלי האובד אדם דואג עליו ולא מתייאש ממנו כל שנים עשר חדש כי על כן אמר בפ' אלו מציאות שהמוצא חייב להכריזו שלשה

Like man who worries about his lost item for about 12 months then is מייאש - gives up hope....of retrieval. The implication being that in some sense we still hope for our lost ones to return for a year then give up hope after this time. ייאוש has a feel closer to the emotions of sadness, loss, mourning, then slow recovery.

מתני' ועד מתי חייב להכריז עד כדי שידעו בו שכניו דברי ר"מ ר' יהודה אומר שלש רגלים ואחר הרגל
האחרון שבעה ימים כדי שילך לביתו שלשה ויחזור שלשה וכריז יום אחד

MISHNA: And until when is one who finds a lost item **obligated to proclaim** his find? He is obligated to do so **until** the moment **that the neighbors will know of its** existence; this is **the statement of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Yehuda says:** He is obligated to proclaim his find for **three pilgrimage Festivals and for seven days after the last of the three pilgrimage Festivals, so that** its owner **will** have time to **go to his home**, a trip lasting up to **three** days, and ascertain that he in fact lost the item, **and he will return** to Jerusalem, a trip lasting up to **three** days, **and proclaim** his loss for **one day**.

King David laments being forgotten by his friends like a dead person fades from memory, (even while alive) comparing himself to a lost vessel אביד כלי | I prefer a broken vessel, or ovoid as in wander away, lost, or dead.

In Psalm 119 however, King David then alludes to himself as a lost object forever hopeless of being found. Psalm 119:176....I am a lost sheep...kaseh ovoid...אביד כשה
Here the forgetting is not by men but by the divine, due to the straying of the lamb from the rest of the flock. "Please seek out your servant" he asks of God, since he is lost and the rational is that he had not "forgotten" the commandments.
Rather than resentment in Psalm 31 here we find a send of desolation and forlornness and the prayer is a heartfelt one beseeching the shepherd not to give up on the lamb.

The Baal Shem Tov uses an analogy of a spiral staircase. In Yiddish a spiral staircase is called "*shvindel trep*," literally: Swindling steps. Why? Because when you climb a regular vertical staircase, you see the destination and you see yourself getting closer to it as you climb the stairs. A spiral staircase "swindles" you, because as you get closer to the destination you have to turn completely around, in a 360-degree turn, to the point when cannot see the apex. Indeed, just before you reach the top, you must turn completely around for the last time. When you're still far from the destination you may be able to see it, but just before reaching your destination you have your back to it. The trick is to see it through.

In a dramatic exegesis Reb Nachman in [Likutei Mehoran I Torah 206](#) discusses the verse

"I have strayed like a lost sheep: seek out Your servant" (Psalm 119:176)

(תהילים קי"ט:קע"ו) 'תעיתי כְּשֶׂה אֲבִד בְּקֶשׁ עֲבָדְךָ וְכוּ

“*Taiti K'seh Ovaïd* (I have strayed like a lost sheep); seek out Your servant [for I have not forgotten Your commandments].” ([Psalms 119:176](#))

כי יש חלוק גדול בעבירה שעושה האדם, חס ושלום, בין אם נתעורר תכף ומיד ושב בתשובה, אזי אפשר לו בקל לחזור למקומו, כי עדין לא נתרחק הרבה מהדרך הטוב. פי כשעושה עברה, חס ושלום, אזי הולך ונוטה מהדרך הישר אל דרך אחר ממקלל, ושם יוצאים מאותו הדרך כמה וכמה נתיבות ודרכים תועים ומקלקלים מאד, שפשמתחילין לילך, חס ושלום, באותו הדרך הרע, אזי תועים ונבוכים באלו הדרכים עד שקשה לשוב ולצאת משם

There is a great difference in the sin a person commits, God forbid, whether he is stirred immediately to repentance, in which case it is easy for him to return to his place, since he has not yet moved far from the good road. The reason is that when someone commits a sin, God forbid, he then turns from the straight road to another path, which is crooked. That road leads into a number of other paths and roads that are particularly misleading and tortuous, such that when people start to go on that evil road, God forbid, they stray and get so confused on these [other] roads that it is difficult to return and get out from there.

אבל השם יתברך דרכו לקרות את האדם תכף כשרוצה שהוא תועה מדרך השכל, וקוראו שישוב לאחוריו, ולכל אחד קורא לפי בחינתו: יש שקוראו ברמיזה, ויש בקריאה ממש, ויש שבועט בו ומפנהו, וזהו הקריאה שלו, כי אורייתא מכרזת קמיהו: עד מתי פתיים תאקהבו פתי, והתורה הוא השם יתברך בעצמו, שהוא קורא אותם ומבקשם שיחזרו אליו

But God’s way is to call to the person immediately when He sees him straying from the way of the intellect. He calls to him to turn back. And [God] calls to each person according to his aspect. To one He calls with a hint, and to another with an actual call. There is also one whom He tramples down and punishes, and that is his call. For the Torah calls to them, “Fools, how long will you love being misled?” ([Proverbs 1:22](#)). And the Torah is God Himself, who calls to them and seeks them, that they should return to Him.

ועל-כן כשעדין לא נטה הרבה מדרך הישר, אזי אפשר לו בקל לשוב, מחמת שהוא מכיר עדין את הקול ורגיל בו, כי זה סמוך הנה אצל השם יתברך, והנה שומע קולו קול התורה, ועדין לא שכח את הקול, ועדין לא תעה הרבה באלו הדרכים האחרים התועים והנבוכים, ועל כן בקל אפשר לו לשוב

Therefore, if one has not yet strayed far from the straight road it is easier for him to return, since he still recognizes the voice and is familiar with it; for it was not so long ago that he was with God and heard His voice, the voice of the Torah. He has not yet forgotten the voice or strayed far along these other misleading and confusing roads. Therefore, he can easily repent.

והוא כמשל הרועה, שכאשר שיה אהד תועה מהדרך אזי תכף הוא קורא אותו, וכשהשה עדין לא תעה הרבה מהדרך, אזי הוא מכיר הקול והולך אחריו תכף. אבל כשכבר נטה הרבה מהדרך, אזי כבר שכח את הקול ואינו מכיר בו. וגם הרועה

מֵאַשׁ עוֹד מִלְבָּקֶשׁוֹ, מִחֲמַת שָׁנָה זְמַן רַב שֶׁהִלֵּךְ וְתַעֲזָה מֵאַתּוֹ, כּוֹן כְּשֶׁכִּבֵּר הָאָרֶיךָ זְמַן, חֵס וְשָׁלוֹם, בְּרַשְׁעוֹ, וְנִטְהָ וְתַעֲזָה הַרְבֵּה מִהִדְרָךְ הַיָּשָׁר לְאֵלֵי הַדְרָכִים הַמְקַלְקְלִים וְהַתּוֹעִים וְהַנְּבֹכִים וְהַמְבַלְבְּלִים, אֲזִי קָשָׁה לוֹ לְשׁוּב כַּנִּלְ

This is analogous to a shepherd who, when one sheep strays from the road, he immediately calls to it. If the sheep has as yet not strayed far from the road, it will recognize the voice and immediately follow it. However, if it has already strayed far from the road, then it will have already forgotten the voice and no longer recognize it. Furthermore, the shepherd will despair looking for [the sheep], since it has been so long that it has strayed from him. Similarly, when one has been wicked for a long time, God forbid, and turned and strayed greatly from the straight path to these other tortuous, misleading, confusing and befuddling roads, then it is difficult for him to repent, as explained above.

וְדַע, שֶׁאֵלֵי הַדְרָכִים הַמְקַלְקְלִים וְהַתּוֹעִים, כְּשֶׁאָדָם תּוֹעֵה בָהֶם, חֵס וְשָׁלוֹם, הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד, אֶפְשָׁר לְפַעֲמִים שִׁיתַּעֲזָה מְאֹד וְיִלְךְ בְּאֵלֵי הַדְרָכִים הַנְּבֹכִים, וְאֲזִי דִיקָא מְרַב תַּעֲזוּתוֹ בָּהֶם, וְתַהַפֵּךְ וְיָשׁוּב עַד שִׁיתַּעֲזָה סְמוּךְ מְאֹד לְמִקוּמוֹ הָרֵאשׁוֹן, וְלֹא יִהְיֶה רַק הַרְחָק מֵעַט בֵּינוֹ לְבֵין מִקוּמוֹ הָרֵאשׁוֹן, וְיִקַּל עַל יְדֵי נְסִיוֹן קַל יָשׁוּב עוֹד לְמִקוּמוֹ, אֲבָל כְּשֶׁהִשֵּׁם וְתַבְרַךְ קוֹרְאוֹ וּמְזַמֵּין לוֹ הַנְּסִיוֹן, אֵינּוּ מְכִיר בְּקוֹל, וְאֵינּוּ חוֹשֵׁשׁ לְשׁוּב לְמִקוּמוֹ.

Know, too, that when a person strays greatly on these tortuous and misleading roads, God forbid, it is occasionally possible that he will stray so far and go on these confusing roads [for so long], that precisely because he has strayed so greatly, he will turn around and go back, until he is close to his starting point; there will be only a short distance separating him from his starting point. And then, easily, by means of an easy test, he can again return to his place. Yet when the Holy One calls him and arranges the test for him, he does not recognize the voice and gives no heed to returning to his place.

וְזֶה הוּא הַחֵלּוֹק שֶׁבֵּין עוֹל יָמִים לְזָקֵן, כִּי מִי שֶׁעֲדָן בְּבַחְרוּתוֹ וְעֲדָן לֹא הִזְקִין בְּחַטָּאִיו, אֶפְשָׁר לוֹ יוֹתֵר לְשׁוּב מִהִזְקֵן, מִחֲמַת שֶׁעֲדָן הוּא סְמוּךְ וְלֹא שָׁכַח אֶת הַקוֹל הַקָּרִיאָה.

This is the difference between a younger and an older person. For someone who is still young, who has as yet not grown old in his sins, is more likely to repent than an older person, because he is still close and has not forgotten the voice that calls.

וְזֶה: תַּעֲזָה בְּשָׂה אֲבָד – הִינּוּ שֶׁתַּעֲזָה מִהִדְרָךְ הַיָּשָׁר בְּשָׂה אֲבָד הַנּוֹטָה מִהִדְרָךְ כַּנִּלְ, עַל כֵּן אֲנִי שׁוֹאֵל מִלְפָּנֶיךָ

And this is the explanation of [the opening verse]: {**“I have strayed like a lost sheep; *bakesh* (seek out) Your servant for I have not forgotten Your commandments.”**} **I strayed like a lost sheep**—That is, I strayed from the straight road, like a lost sheep that has gone off the road, as explained above. Therefore, I ask of You:

בְּקֹשׁ עֲבָדְךָ, כִּי מְצוֹתֶיךָ לֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי – הִינּוּ שֶׁתַּמְהַר לְבַקֵּשׁנִי, כֹּל זְמַן שֶׁאֲנִי זוֹכֵר עֲדָן אֶת הַקוֹל הַקָּרִיאָה שֶׁל הַתּוֹרָה, וְהַמִּצְוֹת,

***bakesh* Your servant, for I have not forgotten Your commandments**—That is, hurry and seek me while I still remember the voice that calls, of the Torah and mitzvot.

וְזוֹהוּ: בְּקֹשׁ עֲבָדְךָ, כִּי מִצְוֹתֶיךָ לֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי – שְׁתַּמְהַר לְבַקֵּשׁנִי תַּכְּפָה, כִּי מִצְוֹתֶיךָ לֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי עֲדֵינוּ, וְעֲדֵינוּ אֲנִי מִכִּיר אֶת קוֹל הַקְּרִיאָה שֶׁל הַמִּצְוֹת, שֶׁהֵם הַתּוֹרָה, עַל־כֵּן בְּקֹשְׁתִּי – שְׁתַּרְחֵם עָלַי לְבַקֵּשׁנִי מְהֵרָה מִיָּד, כֹּל זְמַן שֶׁעֲדֵינוּ לֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי אֶת מִצְוֹתֶיךָ, דְּהֵינּוּ שֶׁעֲדֵינוּ אֲנִי מִכִּיר אֶת קוֹל הַקְּרִיאָה שֶׁל הַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוֹת

This is: “*Bakesh* Your servant, for I have not forgotten Your mitzvot”—hurry, seek me immediately, for I have as yet not forgotten Your mitzvot and I still recognize the voice that calls, of the mitzvot, which are the Torah. Therefore, my *BaKaShah* (request) is that You have pity on me to *BaKeSh* me quickly, immediately, while I still have not forgotten Your mitzvot—i.e., I still recognize the voice of the Torah and mitzvot that calls.

כִּי כְּשֶׁחָס וְשָׁלוֹם, הָאָדָם גִּזְקוֹן בַּחַטָּאִים קָשָׁה מְאֹד לְבַקֵּשׁוֹ, כִּי כִּבֵּר שָׁכַח אֶת קוֹל הַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוֹת, וְאֵינּוּ מִכִּיר בְּקוֹל הַקְּרִיאָה, עַל־כֵּן צָרִיךְ הָאָדָם לְבַקֵּשׁ מֵהַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, שְׁיִמְהַר הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ לְבַקֵּשׁוֹ לְהַחְזִירוֹ אֵלָיו, כֹּל זְמַן שֶׁלֹּא שָׁכַח עֲדֵינוּ לְגַמְרֵי אֶת קוֹל הַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוֹת כִּנְ"ל

For if, God forbid, a person grows old in sin, it is very hard to seek him. This is because he has already forgotten the voice of the Torah and mitzvot, and does not recognize the voice that calls. Therefore, a person must request of the Holy One that He hurry and seek him, to bring him back to Him while he has as yet not completely forgotten the voice of the Torah and the mitzvot, as explained above.

וְזוֹהוּ מֵה שֶׁבִּקֵּשׁ דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ, עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם: בְּקֹשׁ עֲבָדְךָ, כִּי מִצְוֹתֶיךָ לֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי, כִּנְ"ל

This is what King David, of blessed memory, requested: “Seek out Your servant, for I have not forgotten Your commandments.”

When a person sins, it makes a big difference if he comes to his senses at once and repents, in which case it is easy for him to return to his place because he has not yet strayed too far from the good path.

For when a person sins, he turns from the straight path and enters a different, twisting pathway. A multitude of wrong turns branch off into ever deeper error and corruption. The person may stray so far and become so entangled that it is very hard for him to turn back and get off the wrong track.

God's way is to call a person the moment He sees him straying from the path of good sense, asking him to turn back. He calls each person in the way most suited to him. To some He beckons with a hint. To others the summons is literally a cry. Some people kick, and He must strike them in order to call them.

For "the Torah cries out before them: '*Fools! How long will you love foolishness?*'"
(Proverbs 1:22, Zohar Shemini 36a) .

The Torah is God's voice calling and begging those who sin to return to Him.

As long as a person has not strayed too far from the right path, it is easy for him to return because he still recognizes the voice. This is because only a short time has passed since he was close to God and heeded His voice, the voice of the Torah. He has not yet forgotten it or strayed too far along those other devious paths. Similarly, when a sheep strays from the path and the shepherd immediately calls it, as long as the sheep has not yet strayed too far, it still recognizes the shepherd's voice and immediately responds.

But once the sheep strays far from the path, it forgets the shepherd's voice and no longer recognizes his call. The shepherd also gives up searching because the sheep has been lost for such a long time .

Similarly, when a person has been going in the wrong direction for a long time , having strayed far from the true path into all those corrupt, devious and confusing pathways, it is hard for him to repent.

Ow Rabbenu in typical paradoxical turn goes darker:

But know, that sometimes a person journeys so far along those corrupt and devious paths that his very wandering brings him close to his original place, there being only a small distance between himself and his original departure point, and it only needs an easy test to bring him back to his starting point .

But when God calls him and arranges the test, the person does not recognize the voice and feels no need to return.

That is the difference between young and old people. One who is still young and has not grown old in his sins can return more easily, because he is still closer and has not forgotten the voice that calls. This is the meaning of the verse,

תְּעִיתִי כְּשֶׂה אֲבִד בְּקֶשׁ עֲבָדְךָ וְכוּ'
"I have strayed like a lost sheep: seek out Your servant"

(Psalms 119, 176) .

"I have strayed like a lost sheep": I have strayed from the good path like a lost sheep that has strayed from the road. This is why I beg of You: ".seek out Your servant, because I have not forgotten Your commandments".

Hurry and search for me as long as I still remember the voice of the Torah and mitzvot. Hurry and search for me immediately, because I have not yet forgotten Your mitzvot: I still recognize the call of the mitzvot of the Torah. That is why I beg You to take pity on me and search me out quickly, as long as "I have not forgotten Your mitzvot" and still recognize the voice of the call of the Torah and the mitzvot.

For when a person grows old in his sins, it is very hard to seek him out as he has already forgotten and no longer recognizes the voice of the Torah and the mitzvot. We must therefore beg God to hurry and bring us back to Him before we completely forget the call of the Torah and mitzvot.

This was King David's prayer: "Search out Your servant, for I have not forgotten Your mitzvot."

IN THIS MAGISTERIAL TORAH RABBEINU PROVIDES US A ROAD MAP TO SPIRITUALITY.

He defines a difference between getting lost early and returning, vs getting lost for a prolonged time when one forgets the path home or the call to return. He seems to be articulating a profound theory of falling/sin/addiction where the possibility of recovery becomes more difficult the deeper and longer one is a victim of the disease. The path of return is treacherous and confusing so that initially it is relatively easy to find one's way back. However, after a while, because one tends to get lost and confused on these roads, it becomes hard to find one's way back or even emerge from there.

Using the parable of a lost sheep he describes the voice of the shepherd still within earshot of the little lost lamb who is able to return since he still recognizes the shepherd's call. Once at too great a distance it can no longer hear the call, or it has been away so long it no longer recognizes the call.

More startlingly he worries "the shepherd may have given up on finding the lamb". The implication is that the divine also "gives up" on the sinner after a time. But then, not satisfied with what might be considered typical mussar type reproof the Rebbe adds the flip side of the "shvindel trep"

But know that sometimes a person journeys so far along those corrupt and devious paths that his very wandering brings him close to his original place, there being only a small distance between himself and his original departure point, and it only needs an easy step to bring him back to his starting point .

Rebbe suggests that the road map itself allows for the path to paradoxically double back on itself so that by just remaining on the confused path one somehow comes quite close to the original point of departure. Of course, if he fails to recognize the invitation of the divine then he will not make use of this paradoxical opportunity.

Yet the very paradoxical posture of being so close is the mirror image of the spiral staircase where one is indeed very close to one's destination yet one's back is facing 180 degrees in the opposite direction.

What is the difference between the Baal Shem Tov's implication and that of Rabbenu?

Both see the roadmap as a “set up” out of one’s control. That the spiritual path is treacherous and despite one’s motives leads one in opposite directions than intended.

However, Rabbenu applies this not only to the path “upwards” towards the divine but also in erring on the path away from the divine. He teaches us that even on the path of sin and corruption, of addiction, where one becomes accustomed to one’s life and one’s own spirituality wherever it leads one, the same “swindling” occurs.

The trick is to become aware of just how close one is whether on the right path or the wrong one! The response is **בְּקֹשׁ עֲבֹדָה** “seek out Your servant” ! A request for divine assistance, in the shepherd, in not forgetting the little lost lamb...” Hurry search me out Lord”

We see here a different approach, a different roadmap, whereby the best we lost sheep can do is pray for the shepherd not to forget us, hurry and remember us before He has lost all memory of us.

As long as we can still recognize His voice, we beg Him to remember us and find us...for we are lost. In this strong reading of the Psalm, Rabbenu has stretched the Baal Shem Tov’s meaning of the *Shvindel Trep* beyond its upwardly pointing direction towards the divine and extends it into the depths of despair and loss.

We live in a world where the divine access is lost, the shepherd has almost forgotten the lost lamb and the road is winding and treacherous. Any belief that we on our own have the capability to “return” on our own steam is fraught. The only path back in this is through the cry and tears for the divine shepherd.

In this year of loss, I have not forgotten
In this loss the memory is fresh
The absence still cuts deep into my heart
I am a lost sheep
I am the object given up for lost
The year has done little to heal the pain
Her loss remains unbearable
Your commandments....Kaddish...*Aveilus*....
Sure, I observed
אוש is the edge of the precipice
She would not wish me to cross
So, I must carry on
Without her presence
Her light
Her gift of life.

I have strayed like a lost sheep²

"I have strayed like a lost sheep: seek out Your servant" (Psalms 119:176).

When a person sins, it makes a big difference if he comes to his senses at once and repents, in which case it is easy for him to return to his place because he has not yet strayed too far from the good path. For when a person sins, he turns from the straight path and enters a different, twisting pathway. A multitude of wrong turns branch off into ever deeper error and corruption. The person may stray so far and become so entangled that it is very hard for him to turn back and get off the wrong track.

God's way is to call a person the moment He sees him straying from the path of good sense, asking him to turn back. He calls each person in the way most suited to him. To some He beckons with a hint. To others the summons is literally a cry. Some people kick, and He must strike them in order to call them. For "the Torah cries out before them: 'Fools! How long will you love foolishness?'" (Proverbs 1:22, *Zohar Shemini* 36a). The Torah is God's voice calling and begging those who sin to return to Him.

As long as a person has not strayed too far from the right path, it is easy for him to return because he still recognizes the voice. This is because only a short time has passed since he was close to God and heeded His voice, the voice of the Torah. He has not yet forgotten it or strayed too far along those other devious paths. Similarly, when a sheep strays from the path and the shepherd immediately calls it, as long as the sheep has not yet strayed too far, it still recognizes the shepherd's voice and immediately responds.

But once the sheep strays far from the path, it forgets the shepherd's voice and no longer recognizes his call. The shepherd also gives up searching because the sheep has been lost for such a long time. Similarly, when a person has been going in the wrong direction for a long time, having strayed far from the true path into all those corrupt, devious and confusing pathways, it is hard for him to repent.

But know that sometimes a person journeys so far along those corrupt and devious paths that his very wandering brings him close to his original place and it only needs an easy test

² Avraham Greenbaum: <https://www.azamra.org/Essential/teshuvah.htm>

to bring him back to his starting point. But when God calls him and arranges the test, the person does not recognize the voice and feels no need to return. That is the difference between young and old people. One who is still young and has not grown old in his sins can return more easily, because he is still closer and has not forgotten the voice that calls.

This is the meaning of the verse, "I have strayed like a lost sheep: seek out Your servant" (Psalms 119, 176). "I have strayed like a lost sheep": I have strayed from the good path like a lost sheep that has strayed from the road. This is why I beg of You: ". seek out Your servant, because I have not forgotten Your commandments". Hurry and search for me as long as I still remember the voice of the Torah and mitzvot. Hurry and search for me immediately, because I have not yet forgotten Your mitzvot: I still recognize the call of the mitzvot of the Torah. That is why I beg You to take pity on me and search me out quickly, as long as "I have not forgotten Your mitzvot" and still recognize the voice of the call of the Torah and the mitzvot.

For when a person grows old in his sins, it is very hard to seek him out as he has already forgotten and no longer recognizes the voice of the Torah and the mitzvot. We must therefore beg God to hurry and bring us back to Him before we completely forget the call of the Torah and mitzvot. This was King David's prayer: "Search out Your servant, for I have not forgotten Your mitzvot."

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