

IT'S ELUL ALREADY???

By Ozer Bergman

Can't be. I just took down the *sukkah* and put it away. Be that as it may, a look at the calendar tells me that, yes indeed, Elul is upon us. That means it's time for reflection and introspection, time for *teshuvah* (return to God). *Teshuvah* is a mitzvah. So, like any other mitzvah, when we do it, we do it cheerfully.

The simplest point of *teshuvah* is change. I was/wasn't doing what I should/shouldn't have been doing. Now I'll change. I'll reflect and introspect, and actually come to realize that honesty is holier than lying, that God would rather have me *quietly* listen to a boring Shabbat speaker than go to the Kiddush Club, etc. I'll read some Rebbe Nachman to work up some genuine religious fervor and make a real commitment—one that I'll keep this time—and voilà! *Teshuvah*, I've changed.

But *teshuvah* is a more radical change than simple behavioral modifications indicate. (By the way, don't let these or other small changes for the better fool you. Change one thing and you change everything. Improve one thing and everything improves.) Rebbe Nachman writes:

Before returning, a person does not yet have being. It is as if he does not yet exist in the world. Indeed, he would be better off had he not been created (Eruvin 13b). But when he prepares to purify himself and return...he will then exist in the world—i.e., "I am prepared to be."

Until we do *teshuvah*, it's as if we don't exist. Until we do *teshuvah*, we would be better off not having been born. Now, if I tell myself that Rebbe Nachman is referring to conniving, ham-eating Sabbath-desecrators, well, maybe I can understand that. Those poor, misguided unfortunates are undermining God's plan for the world by ignoring His Divine will, and earning themselves purgatory to boot. But me? Yeah, I'm not perfect, but I don't exist? And how about Rebbe Nachman's disciples, like Reb Noson and Reb Naftali, to whom he was actually talking when he first delivered this lesson? *They* would've been better off not having been born? Really?

Really. Consider what Reb Noson comments on this lesson:

In truth, mankind has no being in this world. This is because in this world, a human being has no real future—death is inevitable and we take nothing with us. Our only genuine existence is what we prepare for the future, eternal world. One's teshuvah in this world is his preparation to be, to exist...in the eternal world.

Since living for this world is pointless, it would have been better to avoid the pain and aggravation. But if we live here to be prepared—to gestate, as it were—for being born in the eternal world, that's a life of a different color! One of the basic traits we need to live a *teshuvah*-life is patience. As sincere and true as our commitment to change is, we're trying to undo an attitude and behavior that's been ingrained over years, perhaps decades. Some *teshuvah*-changes we sincerely (desperately!) want to make have to swim against the tide of thousands and thousands of anti-Torah decisions and actions we've made until today. That's one reason we need patience.

Another reason for patience is that there's a dirty little secret in doing *teshuvah*. Rebbe Nachman tells us that as sincere as we may be in thinking we want to improve and change, we really aren't. There's still an itsy-bitsy part of us that wouldn't object to having just one more itsy-bitsy taste of some forbidden fruit. So even after the long process of doing *teshuvah*, we have to do *teshuvah* again and again to whittle away that objectionable bit of desire.

The Rebbe writes that the essence of *teshuvah* is remaining quiet (on the outside) and silent (on the inside) when insulted. This silence is an exercise in patience; an exercise in undoing an attitude and behavior to which we've become over-accustomed; an exchange of desire for the objectionable for a more sincere *teshuvah*; and an exchange of no-life for true life.

*a gutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!*

—Based on *Likutey Moharan* I, 6

SIDEPATH

There are times when we do not feel like repenting. For whatever reason, we aren't motivated to return to God. Then again, there are times we try to repent, but cannot find the right gate. There are twelve gates in Heaven, corresponding to the Twelve Tribes of Israel, and each Jew has to direct his prayer to the gate of his tribe; no other tribe will do.

Sometimes we begin to repent and successfully find the gate we need, only to discover when we get there that the gate is closed. Reciting Psalms has the power to arouse even the unmotivated to repent. The Psalms can also direct our prayers to the exact gate we need, or even open the appropriate gate (*Likutey Moharan* II, 73).

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

12:7 Rejoice in all the work of your hands

Hitbodedut Brings Us To Joy

"The work of your hands" refers to the ability to play melodies on musical instruments in order to bring oneself to joy. Joy is a prerequisite to receiving prophecy. As a musician moves his hands across an instrument, putting pressure on the different strings or keys, he extracts the good *ruach* (wind or spirit)—corresponding to prophecy—from the evil *ruach*—corresponding to depression. In this way, he builds the melody—this is the joy (LM I, 54:7).

When a person practices *hitbodedut*, searching for and finding the good points in himself, he also extracts the good *ruach*—his potential for good—from the evil *ruach*, bringing himself to joy (ibid., I, 54:9).

12:23 The blood is the soul

Speaking Falsely Pollutes The Bloodstream

The soul is manifest and expressed through speech, as it is written, "My soul went out when he spoke" (Song of Songs 5:6). And, as the present verse indicates, the soul is associated with the blood. When a person

speaks falsehood, he blemishes speech and pollutes his bloodstream (LM I, 51:1).

13:17 Set the city and all the spoils on fire, burning them completely

Impatience Is A Form Of Anger

One manifestation of anger is impatience. Thus, when idolatry is eradicated, a person can attain the trait of patience (LM I, 155).

13:18 He will grant you compassion and have mercy on you

A Compassionate Person Is Protected From Sinning

Our Sages teach: "It is forbidden to show compassion to a person who lacks *da'at* (higher awareness)" (*Berakhot* 33a). This is because such compassion will be wasted—for instance, such a person may give money to a drug addict, who will just use it to buy more drugs.

But when a person gives charity properly and demonstrates proper compassion, he "will have compassion bestowed upon him" (*Shabbat* 151b). And since it is forbidden to show compassion to one who lacks *da'at*, he will be granted *da'at* as well. This means that he will be protected from sinning, since sin is associated with foolishness and a lack of *da'at* (cf. *Sotah* 3a) (LM I, 116).

14:1 You are children to God

We Have A Unique Status

It therefore behooves you to act as royalty (LH I, p. 208; see also Rashi).

15:8 Open, you should open...Give, you should give

Seeing Double

The Torah doubles the words *PaToaCh tiPhTaCh* (פתח תפתח, open, you should open) and *naToN tiTeiN* (נתן תתן, give, you should give) (Deuteronomy 15:10) (*Yalkut Shimoni, Mishlei* 31).

Torah represents Divine Providence, which incorporates a kind of "double vision": God looks upon us and we look upon Him. The Torah uses a double language to describe the mitzvah of charity because charity breaks one's avarice, which allows for the acceptance of Divine Providence (LH VIII, p. 194a).

15:12 If your fellow Jew or Jewess is sold to you, he or she should work for you for six years

Avoid Depression, Embrace Joy

Va'avadkha (וַעבַדְךָ, he should work for you) comes from the same root as *EVeD* (עבד, slave), connoting depression. A depressed person cannot serve God properly. He must bring himself to joy (LH V, p. 226a).

16:1 Observe the month of springtime... Make the festival of Shavuot... Make for yourselves the festival of Sukkot

The Three Festivals

The initial letters of the names of the Three Festivals, *Pesach* (פסח), *Shavuot* (שבועות) and *Sukkot* (סוכות), spell *ShaSeiPh* (ששפ, cut). When we observe the Three Festivals, we can "cut" the Malkhut of Holiness free of the Malkhut of the Other Side and elevate it to prominence (LM I, 135:4).

16:14 Rejoice on your festival

Why Sukkot Is Associated With Joy

Sukkot is the only festival that the Torah specifically associates with joy. That joy is necessary in order to strengthen the angel in charge of rectifying food. Since Sukkot is the Festival of Ingathering (Rashi on Exodus 23:16), when all types of food are gathered in, we strive to ensure that the food we eat does not affect the purity of our minds and intellects (LM II, 5:14).

KITZUR L" M WEEKLY

14 — To Draw Peace (continued)

21. When this wondrous peace increases in the world—as of the kind that will reign in the future—all trade and business will be eliminated from the world. This is the meaning of "The mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah candles extends until the feet disappear from the marketplace" (*Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chaim* 672:2). In other words, by means of the peace that results from the returning of honor to its root, which is holy fear, all trade will cease and "the feet will disappear from the marketplace." [This is also the meaning of the verse,] "The Canaanite will be no more" (Zekhariah 14:21). (This may be understood in light of the Aramaic translation of this verse, in

which *Kana'ani* (Canaanite) is translated as *tagarah* [which means both "merchant" and "strife"]. For trade [i.e., *tagarah*] is the result of strife, as indicated above.)

22. All illnesses, God forbid, are a form of discord, whereby there is "no peace in one's bones." [In such a state, the body's] four basic elements overpower one another and do not coexist in a harmonious and balanced fashion. Healing, on the other hand, is an aspect of harmony and peace.

23. Our Sages, of blessed memory, said, "One who disgraces a Torah scholar is afflicted with an incurable ailment" (*Shabbat* 119b). The primary means of producing peace—which is the essence of all healing—is to wholeheartedly show honor to God-fearing people. In this way, a person returns honor to its root, which is holy fear, and in turn, he merits peace and healing.

24. God's honor radiates in the world only through the tzaddikim. They bring people to righteousness and they work to draw close those who are far from God, bringing them to repentance—and all these are the main sources of God's honor. This is the idea underlying the eulogy that must be made over the passing of the tzaddikim, may God save us.

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