

Farbrengen

With The

Rebbe



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Jewish Educational Media

770 Eastern Parkway

Brooklyn, NY 11213

Sicha 1.

A Time of Closeness

The verse (Yeshayah 55:6) “Seek the L-rd while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near” refers to the Aseres Y’mei Teshuvah, the Ten Days of Repentance (between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur). Although Jews are near to G-d the entire year, as it is written (Devarim 4:7) “For which nation is there so great, that has G-d so near to them, as the L-rd our G-d whenever we call upon Him,” nevertheless, there are varying degrees in closeness; and in the Ten Days of Repentance, the closeness between G-d and Jews is extremely great.

We find a similar idea of varying degrees in the revelation of G-dliness in the world. In the times of the Bais HaMikdash, the revelation of G-dliness was apparent, as our Sages (Pirkei Avos 5:5) said: “Ten miracles were wrought for our forefathers in the Bais HaMikdash” — G-dliness was seen every day. On the other hand, even today, without the Bais HaMikdash, Eretz Yisrael receives continual Divine watchfulness, as stated, “the land which... the eyes of the L-rd your G-d are on it from the beginning of the year until the end of the year.” We see then that there are varying degrees in the revelation of G-dliness: Although the entire Eretz Yisrael receives Divine watchfulness, the G-dly revelation was much greater in the Bais HaMikdash. So too in our case: Although Jews are “the people close to Him” the entire year, they are much closer to G-d during the Ten Days of Repentance.

The Power of Community

In greater clarification, the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 18a) says that the verse “as the L-rd our G-d whenever we call upon Him” speaks of a community. The verse “Seek the L-rd while He may be found” speaks even of an individual (that even an individual can then be close to G-d). The Talmud continues to ask “When can an individual [find G-d]? ... In the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.” In other words, those things which during a year a community can effect, during the Ten Days of Repentance even an individual can effect them. We can see from this the greatness of the Ten Days of Repentance. Normally the gulf between

the power of a community and that of an individual is immense; yet during the Ten Days of Repentance, an individual has the same power of a community. And it also follows that the power of a community during the Ten Days of Repentance is greater still.

Climax in Holiness

Consonant with the dictum that “we constantly rise in matters of sanctity,” each day of the Ten Days of Repentance has a loftier distinction than the preceding days. (Although, of course, there are certain things in which Rosh Hashanah is much loftier.) This is especially true on the Shabbos in the Ten Days of Repentance, Shabbos Shuvah, which is to the Ten Days of Repentance what Shabbos is to the six days of creation. And according to the above dictum that we always rise in matters of sanctity, the distinction of the day which follows Shabbos Shuvah (which this year is Vov Tishrei — the 6th of Tishrei) is extremely great.

Teshuvah for All

In the light of the above, we see how important and precious these days are. Each person must endeavor to utilize every moment in fulfilling his mission, which is to make a dwelling place for G-d in this lower (i.e. physical) world. In the words of the Mishnah: “I was created only to serve my master.” This is done through the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvos, beginning with teshuvah. Teshuvah elevates all mitzvos, since teshuvah makes mitzvos “good and luminous” (Likkutei Torah, Shemini Atzeres 85a).

Teshuvah is not only repentance for wrongdoing, but is also relevant to tzaddikim (completely righteous people). It is explained in Likkutei Torah (Parshas Haazinu), that “the main part of teshuvah is ‘the spirit shall return to the L-rd Who gave it.’” That is, teshuvah is connecting oneself to G-d (“the L-rd Who gave it”), Who gave a person his soul, “a part of G-dliness from Above.” Hence, true teshuvah applies even to tzaddikim, for on whatever level a person may be, he can always come closer to and make stronger the bond with “the L-rd Who gave it.” Since G-d is infinite, so too is the bond with Him.

Infinite Teshuvah

Although a person may have truly repented yesterday, the service of teshuvah still applies again today. Our Sages have said that a person should be in the state of teshuvah all his days, even though on each and every single day he has done perfect teshuvah. For since teshuvah is the service of “the spirit shall return to the L-rd Who gave it,” and G-d is infinite, the return to G-d is also infinite. One can always rise higher and higher in coming closer to G-d.

The service of teshuvah is higher than normal limits, ‘leaping’ over all boundaries. It is thus not limited in time, and can occur in a moment. A moment’s thought of repentance converts a completely wicked person to a completely righteous one. This power comes not from the person himself, for man is created with limits. It comes from a person’s soul which is “a part of G-d from Above,” and whose function is to give life to every limb and organ of a person. Every action of a person is dictated by the G-dly soul. Since the soul comes from G-d, it has no limits on its powers, and thus a Jew can reach the level of teshuvah although it is above all normal limits.

The above particularly applies during the Ten Days of Repentance, when the soul (“a part of G-d”) is particularly close to G-d (“the source”) — “Seek the L-rd while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.” A Jew who needs to repent literally (those who need to “Seek the L-rd” and “call upon Him”), has the assurance that even to such as him, G-d is very close — “He may be found” and “He is near.” This strength given by G-d to each and every Jew, man and woman, assures that the service of teshuvah will be completely successful.

G-d’s closeness to a Jew ensures that he fulfills his mission of making this lower (corporeal) world a fit dwelling place for G-d. A Jew, through his service, elevates and sanctifies even the lowest things, enabling even them to serve as a receptacle to G-d’s presence. Even when engaged in business matters, a Jew has the mission of “fill the earth and subdue it,” to effect the concept that G-d should “reign over the entire world in Your glory” by causing G-d to “reveal the glory of Your kingship over us”.

Sicha 2.

Teshuvah with the community; a paradox?

We spoke earlier of the distinction of an individual during the Ten Days of Repentance, and, as a logical corollary, the even greater distinction of a community in these days. The main service in these days is teshuvah, and hence, there is a greater advantage of teshuvah in a community during the Ten Days of Repentance, then just as an individual.

However, this seems to be paradoxical. Teshuvah, repentance, is in the category of mitzvos which are between man and G-d (and not man and man). Indeed, since teshuvah is the idea of “the spirit shall return to the L-rd Who gave it,” it seems to be even more removed from worldly mundane interests than other mitzvos between man and G-d. Logically then, teshuvah should be performed when a person is alone (not in a community), for then it is easier to “return to the L-rd.” Proper teshuvah requires a true “cheshbon hanefesh,” a searching of one’s soul and self-accounting, to know what to rectify. This includes recognition of the greatness of He Who commanded the mitzvos. Such a “cheshbon hanefesh” requires profound contemplation, which in turn demands solitude. How then can we say that in teshuvah (the main service of the Ten Days of Repentance) there is a distinct advantage to a community compared to an individual? According to the above reasoning, teshuvah needs to be done specifically as an individual, and not within a community?!

Nevertheless, in practice we do see that teshuvah is done within the congregation. A Jew goes to synagogue every day. However, the eagerness to go to synagogue on Yom Kippur is much greater than on a regular day. Even those who do not go to synagogue at other times, find themselves aroused to go on Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur, writes Maimonides (Hilchos Teshuvah 2:7) is “the time of repentance for all, for the single person and the man; it is the time of pardon and forgiveness for Israel, and therefore everyone is obligated to do teshuvah and to confess their wrongdoing on Yom Kippur.” We see in practice then, that on Yom Kippur, the time of teshuvah, Jews gather together as a community, a congregation, and not as individuals. This is proof that the idea of a congregation helps, not hinders the service of teshuvah.

Assistance from one-another

The reason for this is as follows: Teshuvah, as explained previously, is associated with a ‘cheshbon hanefesh,’ soul-searching. But it is impossible for a person to regard himself objectively. How then is it possible for a person to make a true accounting of his deeds? Logically, the only way to make a true ‘cheshbon hanefesh’ is when teshuvah is made together with another person, who can objectively check if the self-accounting made by his friend is an honest, true one, or rather distorted by the person’s subjective view.

True teshuvah, however, needs more: it needs a community, a congregation — ten Jews. Every person has some special quality, be it intelligence, kindness etc. When there is only one other person present at a ‘cheshbon hanefesh,’ it is possible that he is unable to advise his friend regarding deficiencies in conduct in matters which are not his special quality. In the area which is his ‘specialty,’ he will be able to check if the ‘cheshbon hanefesh’ is correct; but not necessarily in other areas — he just doesn’t have the expertise and knowledge. This is where the advantage of teshuvah in a community comes in. A ‘community’ is ten Jews, a holy quorum, which encompasses all the ten categories of Jews enumerated in Scripture. No two are the same, and each has a unique quality in which he is especially careful. In the congregation, when all are together, all the special and different qualities are present — and therefore, a Jew in a congregation can make a true self-accounting, for with the help of the whole congregation (obviously in a pleasant, helpful, and constructive way) every facet of a person can be rectified.

External Deficiencies

When a Jew is engaged in teshuvah, he must be careful not to become depressed from the deficiencies in his service. The Yetzer Hora (Evil Inclination) tries to magnify the deficiencies to a person and induce him to think that all hope is lost — and therefore he may as well go the whole way and really enjoy himself! Hence a person must be careful not to become depressed, and to realize depression is the work of the Yetzer. The Lubavitcher Rebbeim said: “Just as one must know the deficiencies, so too one must know his qualities.” Note that it says ‘the deficiencies,’ whereas in regard to qualities it says ‘his qualities.’ The reason for this is that a Jew in essence has no connection to sin. If he does sin, it is not his deficiency, but an outside thing that has tainted him. A Jew has the mission to

“fill the world and subdue it.” When a person deals with the corporeal world, it is possible that something of it sticks to him. Hence, although it is a deficiency, it is not ‘his’ deficiency — it comes from the world around. Knowing this, a Jew need not become depressed, but realize it his task to rectify the deficiency through teshuvah.

Influence to the outside

The general mission of a Jew is to “fill the earth and subdue it.” A Jew must know that fulfilling this mission involves not only studying Torah and performing mitzvos, but that the soul was sent below to this physical world to ‘subdue’ it. He must utilize all his capabilities in this mission “with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” First and foremost, this means to influence other Jews to fulfill their mission of illuminating the world with Torah and mitzvos. This is mainly achieved by being a living example.

Those who are in a position to also influence non-Jews have the responsibility to ensure that non-Jews conduct themselves properly by keeping the “Seven Noachide Laws”. Success in this task comes from first learning Torah and performing mitzvos, the ‘garments’ of G-d. Since “an emissary of a person is as the person himself,” the words spoken by a Jew in the mission of G-d are the words of G-d Himself!

When a Jew fulfills G-d’s mission, G-d grants him “children, life and ample sustenance,” thus enabling a Jew to fulfill his task to perfection. Then the purpose of creation — to make this world a dwelling place for G-d — is fulfilled, and we merit the fulfillment of the promise “the glory of the L-rd will be revealed and all flesh shall perceive it together, for the mouth of G-d has spoken it.”

The Ramban explains that the verse “it is not far from you... for the thing is very near to you in your mouth and in your heart that you may do it” refers to the mitzvah of teshuvah. The abovementioned mission of influencing the world is part of the service of teshuvah, for we return the world to its state at the beginning of creation (before the sin of Adam). A Jew must know that he has this ability, and “it is very near to you... to do it.” When a Jew’s service is in the proper manner, G-d grants him much more success than he could have achieved solely through his own efforts. And through our fulfilling G-d’s mission properly, with joy and

good heart, we merit to see the world in a state of perfection, in the coming of our righteous Mashiach.

Sicha 3.

The Eternal Soul

Vov Tishrei (the sixth of Tishrei) is the Yahrzeit (anniversary of the passing away) of my mother; and that said above has a connection with the general concept of a Yahrzeit. A Yahrzeit is associated with, and points to, the immortality of the soul. Although it is many years since the passing, and the soul has not been in a body all this time, the soul itself is eternal. But not only does the soul exist in Gan Eden, it affects people in this physical world — and hence every year there are special customs for a Yahrzeit. Moreover, consonant with the rule that in matters of sanctity we always rise higher, every year we must successively increase in those matters associated with the Yahrzeit.

A Yahrzeit is associated with teshuvah. Maimonides writes that a person who is bereaved should “search his deeds and return through teshuvah.” Or in the words of Scripture (Koheles 5:2): “the living will take it to heart (the lessons to be learned from one’s passing).” And since, as explained above, every year we must increase in these things, each year must see an increase in the idea of “the living will take it to heart.” This meditation must be on the manner of service of the person whose Yahrzeit it is, and from whom we must learn proper service and conduct. While there are many things to be learned from a person’s service, the first thing should be from those things which affect and influence us even today.

Noble acts of self-sacrifice

In recent years, it has been possible to learn the Torah written by my father, because his works have now been printed. The study of his works is in the merit of my mother, who enabled him to write his ideas. When my father was exiled to a remote city in Russia [by the Russian government for his work in disseminating Judaism], there was no ink available to write his Torah novella. My mother gathered various herbs in the fields and made a sort of ink from them. This enabled my father to write down his novella.

My father wrote his works on the margins of books (after my mother was permitted to be with him she brought books along), and on a limited number of pieces of paper he had. After my father passed away, my mother guarded these books and pieces of paper and brought them with her (when she left Russia). This was how my father's writings reached here.

It was an incredible act of self-sacrifice on my mother's part to do this, for had the authorities found these writings in her possession, she could have been imprisoned without any due process of law — as so often happens in that country. Moreover, as the wife of a man sentenced to exile for spreading Judaism, she too was suspect, and the danger was correspondingly greater. Particularly since the very name Schneerson alone was enough to show that its bearer had no right to move about freely, and certainly not to leave the country. All these things combined made it extremely dangerous for my mother to keep his writings and bring them out of the country. Yet, notwithstanding this, she did keep them safe, and did succeed in bringing them out of the country. The result is that they were printed and all can learn his Torah.

The lesson: Nothing too difficult

The lesson from the above is as follows: when a Jew attempts to do something, and sees that it seems to be impossible, he should not be affected, but continue working to attain his objective. Eventually he will succeed. Success may elude him for many years, as in the above case, where for years, no one was permitted to leave, except special individuals, and then without any writings etc. Hence, in the natural order of things, it was unthinkable they would allow a woman to leave with writings. We must learn from my mother that a person should not give up in the face of any difficulties, but continue to persevere.

Simply put, if a project seems impossible to achieve, a person has the tendency to think it is more worthwhile to work on something easier, rather than waste time on something that is seemingly impossible. Such a person must know that everything is run by Divine Providence, and since he knows that something needs to be done, it is a lesson to him that he must work on it. There is no time to start reckoning up the chances, for he must first and foremost fulfill G-d's mission! And the above story teaches us that when a Jew truly decides to conduct himself according to the Torah, disregarding all opposition, he will surely succeed. It may take time, but

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eventually it will be done. The methods used may be bound by the finite limits of this physical world; but the enthusiasm of the person must be beyond limits.

If the above is relevant to all countries, it certainly applies to the U.S.A., which was founded as a result of people fleeing from religious persecution in other countries. The vast majority of its citizens believe in G-d, and this belief is even stated on the country's currency — "In G-d We Trust." The U.S.A. has great influence on other countries, and can use this influence in regard to instilling trust in G-d in other peoples.