

Repentance to Freedom

by Ariel Bar Tzadok

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Well, here we are in the New Year. 5772 has begun. Funny, it doesn't seem all that different from the year we left behind. Jewish people around the world spent two whole days in prayer, proclaiming God as King of the Universe. Then, today, the 3rd day of the Hebrew month of Tishrei we fast from sun-up through sun-down in commemoration of the assassination of Gedaliah, governor of Judah after the destruction of the Temple.

I wonder how many have ever read the related chapters in the Book of Jeremiah to understand the historical foundations of this fast and why this assassination was so important that a fast day was established to forever commemorate it? No! I would guess that most have never bothered to open Jeremiah, most likely, many don't care!

After all, it's a fast day. What difference does it make why we fast. We fast because that is what Jewish law says to do, and that's that! We are loyal and we are faithful. We follow the law and the Rabbis who ordain them and we have no further need to ask questions or to waste our time with a study of (boring) history! While many might not come out and say these words (although a surprising high number do), almost everyone who is religious thinks this way.

Here then lies the problem. The days between Rosh HaShana (the New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) are supposed to be days of reflection and repentance. What greater sin can one repent of than the sin of not thinking for oneself? What greater sin is there than not using the great mind that God has placed inside each of us?

Following the law is a good thing and it should be done. However, nothing, but nothing, including the law should ever be followed blindly. We are obligated by God to use the eyes that He has placed in our heads. We are obligated by God to use our minds to think, to scrutinize, to see, to understand and then to act righteously based upon what we see and what we know.

It is unnatural and spiritually/psychologically dangerous to follow without questioning. It is equally personally dangerous for one to accept just any kind of excuse or reason to comply and thus to follow the masses. One who surrenders one's mind to follow the masses is surrendering oneself to follow the leader. In our present world of dangerous leaders, wolves in sheep's clothing, such surrender is a path to extremism, and eventually to violence, destruction and death. One cannot repent and return to God all the while that they embrace the mindset and life style of everything that God opposes and hates!

In the first of the Ten Commandments, God proclaimed Himself to be our Liberator. Freedom from Egypt is not just a historical event of the past. Freedom from Egypt is a daily psychological reality. We must live freedom in order to be free. Freedom begins with

freedom of the mind. The human mind must be free to question, to scrutinize, to explore, to discover, to see and to understand. A mind that cannot or does not do these things cannot be called a free mind.

One without a free mind cannot be called free. One who is not free is still a slave. One who is still a slave is still a prisoner in psychological Egypt. Such a one prays everyday proclaiming their freedom, yet every prayer is hypocrisy, every word is a lie. One who is still a prisoner to ignorance, one who does not think, can never be a true servant to God.

Even God must be questioned, and at times, even challenged. This example is repeated numerous times in the Bible and Agadah sections of the Talmud. Funny, how it is that these two most special sacred sources are the ones most often ignored by students of Judaism today. Maybe this explains why we have such a proliferation of spiritual blindness and mindless submission to questionable authorities.

If now is repentance time, then maybe we should repent of being part of the mindless masses? Maybe we should embrace the original commandment of freedom? Maybe we should make all the uncomfortable and socially unpopular efforts to think for ourselves and learn again what it means to serve God in freedom, instead of as slaves?

Think of the possibilities of what we can see, what we can understand and what we can do, if only we chose to live in freedom and light instead of in mental slavery and darkness. Think about this, if you are still able to think.

Repentance time is now. Repent of darkness and ignorance. Repent of being a sheep in the masses. Become a ram! Become a lion! Become a man! Become a full human being! Learn what it is like to be a full and realized human being created in the Divine Image of God! Maybe then, you can say that you have truly repented. Maybe then you can fast on Yom Kippur and know in your heart that the past is truly behind you and that a new bright future awaits you.

It's all in your hands, as it always is. God will definitely do His part. He only awaits you to do yours! Awaken sleeper! Think and be free! Only in freedom is the mind clear and strong and thus enabled to properly serve God and to bare His light to the world.

May bless us all with a happy and healthy New Year, fill with all good things, primarily amongst them, freedom!