



A Message For The Eseret Yamei HaTeshuva (Ten Penitential Days)

Focus Upon the Heart

*By Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok
Copyright © 2004 by Ariel Bar Tzadok. All rights reserved.*

The time of Teshuva (repentance) and self introspection is upon us. Many in the religious world will concern themselves this week between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur to be meticulous with observing certain stricter interpretations of Torah Law. Many believe that by becoming more “religious” for a week that this will some how influence G-d, The Knower Of All Truths to favor one with a prosperous New Year. It boggles the mind how spiritually immature and blind some individuals can be to actually believe that their feeble attempts to impress G-d will actually work to their benefit.

Teshuva means returning to G-d. Returning to G-d can include becoming more “religious” but this is only of value if one’s intent is sincere, in order to do the right thing, not just to attempt to impress G-d with a worthless show of false piety.

Returning to G-d actually means to restore within us the Image of G-d in which we were created. Yet, in order to do this, one must have an insight into what that inner Divine Image actually is. Some might consider this task to be so sublime and lofty that it is outside of their normal human parameters to pursue. However such a consideration is a falsehood and there is nothing that G-d hates more than falsehood.

Pursuing the restoration of the inner Divine Image can also be referred to in more modern, down to earth terms. We call it, rectifying one’s character and personality. This task is of such vital spiritual value and importance that to merely describe it in down to earth terms takes away from its massive importance in the Divine scheme of things.

During these Ten Penitential Days between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, the true Teshuva desired of us by HaShem is not the hypocritical observance of humrot (stricter opinions of observance of Torah ritual), but rather the sincere rectification of our human character. The one who stands before G-d properly reflecting the Divine Image in this world through one’s character, integrity and personality is the one who is said to have “returned” to Him.



The cultivation of character is no easy thing. This is why so many choose not to pursue it. Proper character means that one must live by a code of ethics and morality wherein which the individual is not the center of his/her own universe, but rather G-d is. Self sacrifice is a normal and desirable characteristic, not for the sake of the praise of others, but simply because it is the right thing to do at the right time in the right place.

Proper character before G-d requires of one the cultivation of such traits as courage (ometz), honor (kavod which is self respect, not self pride), discipline (musar) and responsibility (arvut). These four traits serve as the four pillars of the Merkava (chariot / throne) through which the spirit of G-d can shine through the human personality.

* **COURAGE** (ometz) means that one rises up to any occasion without hesitation or fear, knowing full well that HaShem is at one's right hand and that one will not fall (Psalm 16:8). Courage means that one looks at any difficult task as a challenge, desiring to take on the challenge in order to prove that with G-d's help there is nothing that one cannot do; for it is G-d that gives us the power to do great things (Deut. 8:18).

* **HONOR** (kavod) means self respect. One stands constantly in the knowing presence of the Divine and acts accordingly. One does no debasing or disgraceful thing. One does not compromise one's integrity for the sake of personal gain or for the sake of selfish lust. One does not seek personal benefit at the cost of the harm, loss or lack of any other person. Honor means that one lives by one's conscience, knowing that one's behavior is well pleasing in the eyes of G-d.

* **DISCIPLINE** (musar) simply means doing what one has to do, regardless of how one feels about it. Discipline is the only salvation for one who lacks control over anything or any area in one's life. Discipline controls how one speaks, and how one acts. It does not and is not meant to control how one feels, discipline rather controls how one expresses how one feels. For example, there are right and wrong times for one to get angry. There are right and wrong means through which anger is to be expressed. If one strikes out to harm with one's anger, then one lacks the discipline of control. Yet, if one disciplines one's anger and expresses it in a proper and directed manner, the force of one's convictions can help better many a situation and person. Discipline means that we choose how to act and speak, directed as always by the inner knowing of the Will and Torah of HaShem.

* **RESPONSIBILITY** (arvut) means always doing the right thing. When something needs to be done, and one is in the position to do it, then one can rest assured that you are the right person in the right place at the right time sent by the Will of G-d to accomplish the right results. Responsibility means that one can take upon oneself any yoke or burden knowing full well that if it is G-d's Will that this burden be carried, then by all means one has the strength to carry it for however long is necessary. Responsibility does not seek



to place blame on another, not on another person, and not even on the yetzer hara (evil inclination). G-d has assigned us tasks in life, be they the general task of Torah observance or the personal tasks of our daily obligations. Whatever our tasks may be, take responsibility for them and JUST DO IT!

When we refine our character before G-d, we enable G-d to move through us here on Earth. We become G-d's Merkava chariot. When we accomplish this great task on a Jewish national level, we will with ease be able to bring the coming of our long awaited Mashiah. Mind you, to think about all Jews as a single nation, with single and united national aspirations and obligations is part of our collective Torah responsibility. This is the true definition of Religious Zionism. It is a mitzvah aseh d'oraiita (a Torah obligation) for all Jews to think this way and live this way.

One must remember that the most important character trait of them all is humility, for one to recognize that even with all the great gifts bestowed upon us by our blessed Creator, nonetheless, whether great or small, rich or poor, wise or fool, we are all but mere mortals in His great Divine Eye. No one has special standing before the Creator, for we are all His creations.

Only one who is not full of self can become full of G-d. Therefore to cultivate the awareness that we are all mere mortals of equal creation before G-d and that personal riches or positions of power mean nothing before Him, this is the pathway towards true return (repentance/Teshuva).

Our job is simple, fear G-d, observe His commandments, follow His Torah and allow His Divine Image to shine from within our hearts; to do the right thing simply because it is just that, the right thing.

If you follow the path of proper character development many might become offended by your renewed straightforwardness and simplicity. Pay their objections no mind. Place G-d before you always, not the opinions of others. Others are concerned by their own self interest; they have no honor when they act like this. You are the honorable one, armed with courage and discipline to take on your responsibilities to DO THEM.

You have now read my words. Let me share with you some words of two others. May their words and mine speak to your hearts.

“All who come to these gates [to seek out HaShem] should not run ahead in one's spirit to come at just any moment to enter [the domains of] holiness. [One must first] purify one's thoughts from foolish momentary things and cleanse oneself from arrogance and anger; for these are the hindrances (klipot) that prevent one from entering within to gaze upon the pleasantness of HaShem and to visit within His Palace. One must humble



oneself before all people; [even] to hear oneself being abused and to bare it. [All one does must be] for the sake of Heaven and to show compassion even upon those who one hates (with the exception of those who hate G-d). One must be of a giving heart and humble spirit. One must despise the lust for power and pride, as well as the lust of over-eating (bad foods) and the lust towards women. One must [above all things] love truth and hate falsehood. One must be modest [and unassuming] and seek out the respect of men of wisdom. The essence of one's intentions should be [for the acquisition of] the wisdom of truth. One should not study this wisdom in order to become haughty [over one's accomplishments] G-d forbid. One's prayer to G-d should always be that [one's path] should be straight lest one waver (fall) from the truth, either to the right or to the left."

Rabbi Avraham Abulafia
Introduction to Sefer Hayei Olam HaBa

"There was an episode with one individual who was known for his many fast days; for giving much charity and supporting many in need; however he was also one who pursued power. He approached the Mitbodedim (the prophetic Kabbalists) who had ascended to the level of prophecy and said to their leader, "Please sir, [I appeal to] your mercy, show me the reason for this why after I have done all the good things [that I have done] why I [too] have not merited to the level of prophecy to see the future like you." [The leader responded and] said to him, "Take a bag filled with sweet nuts and figs and tie it around your neck. Go to the center of town in the presence of the city leaders and elite, gather around you some children and say to them, whoever wants some of these sweets [first] come and strike me with your hand, first on the neck and then on my cheek. If you do this a number of times, then [you can] return to me and I will guide you in the path of acquiring truth." [The man] responded and said, "Sir, how can I, a respected individual do such a thing?" [The leader] responded and said, "This is a big deal in your eyes? This is only the easiest of things you would have to do if you [truly] desire for your soul to see the light of truth." Immediately the man turned and walked away sorely disappointed."

Rabbi Hayim Vital
Sha'arei Kedusha, (from the censored Section Four)

Take these words to heart, as the pasuk in the Shema says, "these words that I command you this day shall be upon your hearts." Place them not in your head to seek intellectual avenues to contradict them and thus nullify their message. Seek straightness of heart, feel these words of Torah and you will know them to be true. Cast out all rationalizations and justifications. You know the right thing in your heart because G-d put it there. Now, stop talking and thinking and go out and JUST DO IT!

Gamar Hatimah Tova to all.