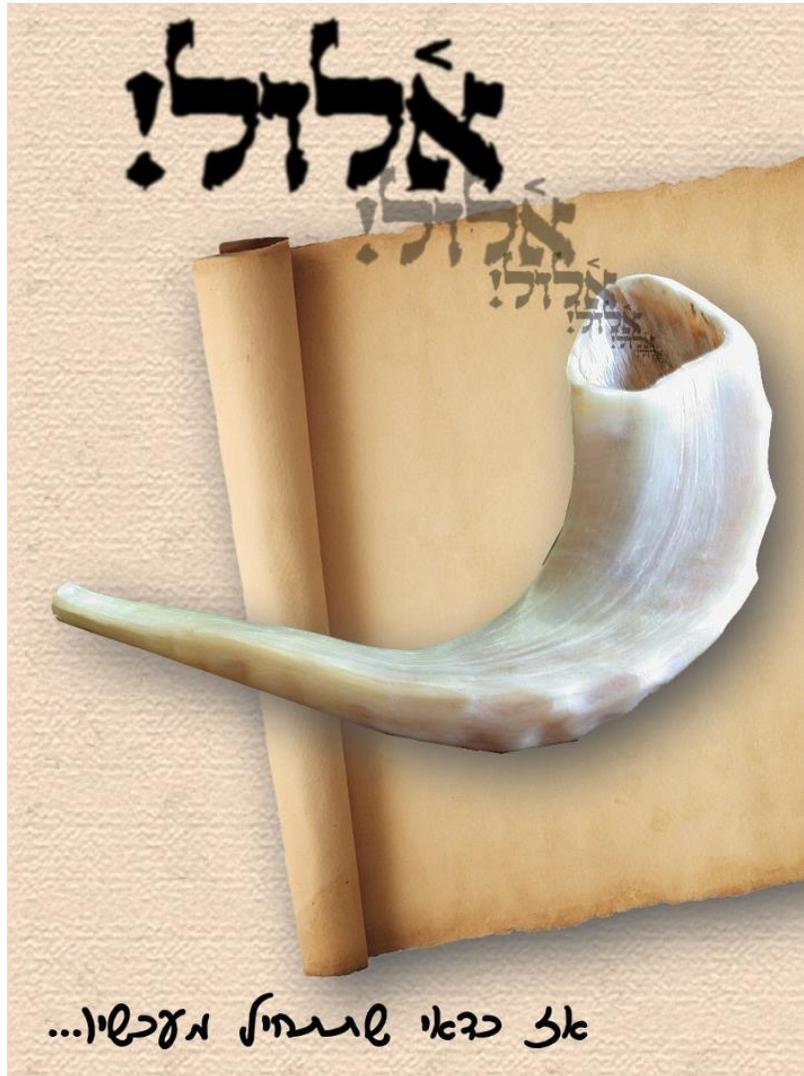


Thoughts for Elul



אלו כבאנו לשוב אליו...

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11 Return to Me... that I may return to you.
Zechariah 1:3

Though summer still lingered and the day was bright and sunny, there was a change in the air. One smelled already the Elul-scent; a teshuvah-wind was blowing. Everyone grew more serious, more thoughtful.... All awaited the call of the shofar, the first blast that would announce the opening of the gates of the month of mercy.

— Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn

This year, the month of *Elul* - considered a particular time for repentance and reconciliation with G-d - begins the evening of August 15th. The name of the month is a reminder that this season of repentance (*teshuvah*) and spiritual reflection is not to be a time of heaviness or morbid introspection. *ELUL* (*aleph, lamed, vav, lamed*) is an acronym for Song of Songs chapter 6 verse 3:

Ani le'dodi ve'dodi li.

I am for my Beloved and my Beloved is for me.

The month of *Elul* provides a special opportunity to turn one's heart to God in love as we are reminded that *teshuvah*, repentance, is a loving gift from our faithful Father.

Throughout the month of *Elul* (Eve of 15th August – Eve of 12th September) in order to help focus our thoughts and hearts during this important season of repentance, and of seeking the purposes of our Father in Heaven both in our personal lives and on the wider universal scale, we are sharing “**Thoughts for Elul**” with you.

We welcome you to join us on the His Israel FaceBook page or on the website and share *your* thoughts during this very special time.

In hopeful anticipation,

~ Keren and Cindy



Day 1 - Saturday Eve, August 15-16

And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. (Luke 15:20)

The message of this parable is that God, at every turn, surprises us by His grace. He truly is a merciful and loving Father. Beyond both logic and law, He loves us. His great salvation is more than a legal transaction; it is a loving relationship. Contrary to a distant and stern lawgiver, the God of Israel is a father willing to run the gauntlet, even to humiliate Himself for His children. Even in our imperfect repentance, He rushes to meet us, bless us and call us His sons. Surely it is not difficult to turn ourselves wholly over to such a loving father. God says, "My sons, present to me an opening of repentance no bigger than the eye of a needle, and I will open for you gates wide enough for wagons and carriages to enter!"*

- RAVDAP, Dwight A. Pryor

* R. Yasa – *Shir HaShirim* Raba 5



Day 2 - Sunday Eve, August 16-17

The most unnoticed of all miracles is the miracle of repentance. It is not the same as rebirth; it is transformation, creation. In the dimension of time there is no going back. But the power of repentance causes time to be created backward and allows re-creation of the past to take place. Through the forgiving hand of G-d, harm and blemish which we have committed against the world and against ourselves will be extinguished, transformed into salvation.

God brings about this creation for the sake of humanity when a human being repents for the sake of God.

- Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel



Day 3 - Monday Eve, August 17-18

The concept of teshuvah is generally understood to mean a returning to G-d. Teshuvah then involves not humiliation but reaffirmation of the self in G-d's image, after G-d's likeness.

- Jacob Neusner



Day 4 - Tuesday Eve, August 18-19

Teshuvah – repentance – does not come to embitter life but to sweeten it.

- Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook



Day 5 - Wednesday Eve, August 19-20

It was Judaism, through the concept of teshuvah, that brought into the world the idea that we can change. We are not predestined to continue to be what we are.

- Rabbi Jonathan Sacks



Day 6 - Thursday Eve, August 20-21

Certain sages go so far as to include teshuvah among the entities created before the world itself. The implication of this remarkable statement is that teshuvah is a universal primordial phenomenon; in such a context it has two meanings. One is that it is embedded in the root structure of the world; the other, that before we were created, we were given the possibility of changing the course of our lives. In this latter sense teshuvah is the highest expression of our capacity to choose freely.

- Adin Steinsaltz



Day 7- Friday Eve, August 21-22

Teshuvah is not something one does once and for all; rather, it is a lifelong journey, a journey of spiritual homecoming.

- Estelle Frankel



Day 8 – Saturday Eve, August 22-23

“The Day of Atonement atones for sins against God, not for sins against man, unless the injured party has been appeased” (*Mishna Yoma* 8:9).

That last clause, “unless the injured party has been appeased,” suggests that for at least one crime, murder, there can be no complete repentance, since there is no way to appease the injured party. This distinctively Jewish belief separates most Jewish thinkers from their Christian counterparts.

In Simon Wiesenthal’s *The Sunflower*, written in 1976, there is an autobiographical account of an incident involving an acute ethical dilemma from the Viennese Nazi-hunter’s own life. Late in the war, when Wiesenthal was a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp, he was plucked one morning from his work detail by a nurse and taken to the bedside of a dying Nazi soldier. The soldier proceeded to tell Wiesenthal much of his life story; most significantly, that though he had been raised as a Catholic altar boy, he had later joined the SS. During the invasion of Poland, he had rounded up Jews: In one town, he had herded the local Jewish community into a building, which was then set on fire.

Now that he had spent days lying in bed waiting to die, he realized the awful thing he had done and needed to know that a Jew forgave him. Wiesenthal remained silent and left the room. Thirty years later, he sent his account of the incident to leading Jewish and Christian figures, and asked them: “Was I right in not forgiving this repentant Nazi?” With few exceptions, the Christian respondents said that he should have done so. As Gustave Heinemann, the former German minister of justice, put it: “Justice and Law, however essential they are, cannot exist without forgiveness. That is the quality that Jesus Christ added to justice.” Likewise, almost without exception, the Jewish respondents argued that he could not forgive the Nazi. The only ones empowered to grant forgiveness were the victims, which is why in this case forgiveness was literally a “dead issue.”

- Jewish Virtual Library, *Jewish Concepts: Repentance*



Day 9 – Sunday Eve, August 23-24

Great is teshuvah for it brings healing to the world.

- Talmud, *Yoma* 86a



Day 10 – Monday Eve, August 24-25

Teshuvah is so great that [after sincere repentance] intentional sins are accounted as *zechuyot*, merits.

- Resh Lakish



Day 11 – Tuesday Eve, August 25-26

In the Torah, sin is something more than a transaction in the soul, or even an act of wrongdoing narrowly conceived. It is an act in the wrong place. It disturbs the moral order of the world.

The words for sin – *chet* and *averah* – both have this significance. Chet comes from the same verb as “to miss a target.” Averah, like the English word “transgression,” means “to cross a boundary, to enter forbidden territory, to be in a place one should not be.”

Only when we understand this does it become clear why the deepest punishment for sin in the Torah is exile. Adam and Eve were exiled from Eden. Cain was condemned to be an eternal wanderer. We say in our prayers, “Because of our sins we were exiled from our land.” Because a sin is an act in the wrong place, its consequence is that the one who performs it finds himself in the wrong place – in exile, meaning, not at home.

Sin alienates; it distances us from G-d, and the result is that we are distanced from where we ought to be, where we belong. We become aliens, strangers.

- Rabbi Jonathan Sacks



Day 12 – Wednesday Eve, August 26-27

Repentance is an absolute, spiritual decision made in truthfulness. Its motivations are remorse for the past and responsibility for the future. Only in this manner is it possible and valid.

- Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel



Day 13 – Thursday Eve, August 27-28

At an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting a man who had been sober for twenty-one years, said, 'The man I was drank. The man I was will drink again. But now I am a different man.'

Consequently, repentance is not complete if one merely regrets having done wrong... True repentance thus consists of changing one's character to the point where, as the person is now, one can no longer even consider doing the forbidden act.

- Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski



Day 14, Friday Eve, August 28-29

In the place where penitents stand even the wholly righteous cannot stand.

- Rabbi Abbahu



Day 15 – Saturday Eve, August 29-30

Teshuvah holds a primary place in Torah and in life. All the hopes of the individual and of society depend on it.

- Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook



Day 16 – Sunday Eve, August 30-31

Repentance is usually associated with sadness. For it is feelings of regret and remorse that play a leading role in motivating a person to change his conduct. Teshuvah, by contrast, is characterized by joy. Through teshuvah, a person renews his relationship with God.

- adapted from *Ten Days of Teshuvah* of Lubavitcher Rebbe



Day 17 – Monday Eve, August 31 - September 1

Teshuvah—returning—is the name Judaism gives to this process of retrieving our sense of direction. Repentance is the ultimate form of return. After turning our gaze away from God and straying from the straight path, we can still find our way back. And it is as simple as taking just one step in a new direction. For turning in a new direction, by as little as one degree, will lead us over time to a wholly different destination.

- Dr. Louie E. Newman



Day 18 – Tuesday Eve, September 1-2

The Hebrew word for repentance, teshuvah, means return. Yet it also means answer. Return to God is an answer to Him. For God is not silent.

- Abraham Heschel



Day 19 – Wednesday Eve, September 2-3

Teshuvah is not a somber process of self-deprivation but a joyful journey back to Hashem and to the core of who we are.

- Rav Moshe Weinberger



Day 20 – Thursday Eve, September 3-4

Teshuvah begins with the self, but it must not end there; it would be only half a prayer. Teshuvah is neither Divine grace segregated from human works nor human works amputated from the arms of grace. What begins as a solitary search within the self evolves into sanctification of our world.

–Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis



Day 21 – Friday Eve, September 4-5

Penitence is the aspiration for the true original freedom, which is the Divine freedom, wherein there is no enslavement of any kind.

- Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook



Day 22 – Saturday Eve, September 5-6

For there is no repentance which does not from its inception enclose the blueprint of a new heart. Repentance kills only to create. It annihilates only to rebuild. It is already building secretly where it still seems to destroy.

- Max Scheler



Day 23 – Sunday Eve, September 6-7

Like water, teshuvah is both destructive and creative. It dissolves the person you were but simultaneously provides the moisture you need to grow anew. It erodes the hard edges of your willfulness but also refreshes your spirit. It can turn the tallest barriers of moral blindness into rubble while it also gently nourishes the hidden seeds of hope buried deep in your soul. Teshuvah, like water, has the power both to wash away past sin and to shower you with the blessing of a new future, if only you trust it and allow yourself to be carried along in its current.

- Dr. Louis E. Newman



Day 24 – Monday Eve, September 7-8

...the offended person is not obliged to offer *mechila* (forgiveness) if the offender is not sincere in his or her repentance and has not taken concrete steps to correct the wrong done... The principle that *mechila* ought to be granted only if deserved is the great Jewish “No” to easy forgiveness. It is core to the Jewish view of forgiveness, just as desisting from sin is core to the Jewish view of repentance.

— David R. Blumenthal



Day 25 – Tuesday Eve, September 8-9

The origin of words is often a good indicator of their deeper meaning. This is surely the case with the well-known Hebrew word “teshuvah,” often rendered in English as penitence or repentance. Yet the etymology of each term in this pairing is decidedly different and reminds us of what is always lost in translation. Both English words derive from a Latin root meaning “to regret,” whereas the Hebrew term comes from the root “to return.” The contrast is pronounced: etymologically, the English concept stresses a state of mind, the Hebrew, an action to be taken.

- Ismar Schorsch, chancellor of The Jewish Theological Seminary



Day 26 – Wednesday Eve, September 9-10

If a Jew commits a sin, he brings about a state of imbalance not just for himself and not just religiously but in the world at large. His sin also affects the laws of nature and physical life.

- Rav Moshe Weinberger



Day 27 – Thursday Eve, September 10-11

Teshuvah is not a somber process of self-deprivation but a joyful journey back to Hashem and to the core of who we are.

- Rav Moshe Weinberger



Day 28 – Friday Eve, September 11-12

Whence can it be proved that one who repents is regarded as if that person had gone up to Jerusalem, built the Temple and erected the altar and offered upon it all the sacrifices mentioned in the Torah? From the verse, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit” (Psalm 51:19).

– Rabbi Yose ben Tartos



Day 29 – Saturday Eve, September 12-13

Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!

- Yeshua HaMashiach, Rav Yeshua