



JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES

REAL CHANGE IS IN THE AIR!

SOURCE AND DISCUSSION SHEET



The month of Elul, leading up to Rosh Hoshana has always been associated with “teshuva” – returning to G-d.

SOURCE 1: *Elul - I am for My Beloved...*

ELUL (spelled Aleph, Lamed, Vav, Lamed), the Hebrew month before Rosh Hoshana is widely known to be an acronym for several verses in the Torah related to the High Holiday season, the most famous of which is, **A**ni **L**Dodi **V**'**D**odi **L**i, “I (Israel) am for my beloved and my beloved (G-d) is for me” (Shir HaShirim 6:3)

Shir HaShirim is a biblical love song between Israel and G-d. This verse which marks our return to G-d, is described as reconciliation between two lovers, underscoring the inherent quality of love which provides the context for teshuva.

Q: According to the verse which lover needs to take the first step?

SOURCE 2: *Elul is the Month When G-d is Close, Based upon parable of Rabbi Schnuer Zalman of Liadi*

The President's usual place is in the White House in Washington. Anyone wishing to approach the President to speak with him must go through the appropriate channels in the government bureaucracy gaining the approval of a succession of officials, which is difficult. However, every four years when the President is running for office, he holds town meetings far away from the White House. At these times the President greets all his citizens with a smile and a handshake and a person can speak to him at ease.

Though we need to “want it” and take that first step, G-d is right there waiting!

Q: So how do we do it?

HOW TO APPROACH CHANGE

SOURCE 3: *Quotes from Bill Parcells, Hall of Fame Football Coach*

--“Son, I know what you can do, I see what you can be. But I can't want if for you more than you want it for yourself!” spoken to a young Curtis Martin (running back inducted into hall of fame 2012)

--“You are What your record says you are.”(Commenting on team's dismal record despite great talent.)

These two quotes by Bill Parcells capture the essence of the two types of “teshuva” (change) which are both necessary to return to G-d.

Q: What are the two approaches to “teshuva” highlighted above by Coach Parcells? I'll give you a hint. One is the Teshuva of Inspiration and one the Teshuva of Perspiration.

SOURCE 4: *Teshuva of Inspiration: Orot HaTeshuva (15:10) Rav Kook*

When we forget the essence of our own soul... everything becomes confused and in doubt. The primary teshuva, that which immediately lights the darkness, is when a person returns to himself, to the root of his soul – then he will immediately return to God, to the Soul of all souls.

Q: Does this sound like traditional “repentance”? What do you think Rav Kook is suggesting, and implying about all of us?

It's a very hopeful approach to teshuva which highlights that our true natures are unsullied by our past mistakes and that we can return to this higher self, if we really want it. It also suggests that we are “not bad” intrinsically, even if we may have “done bad” in the past.

Q: Yet how can we show G-d (and ourselves) that we are serious about this?

SOURCE 5: *Teshuva of Perspiration: based upon Maimonidies Laws of Teshuva (Return) (2:4)*

What's Teshuva? 1) **Abandon** the mistake(transgression) ...resolving in one's heart not to continue doing it; 2) **Regretting** the mistake; 3) **Resolving never to return** to the mistake, sincerely so G-d will testify to its truthfulness, and lastly to 4) **Confess**, to G-d in your own words regarding the transgression.

This is the day to day work, the “perspiration” of teshuva, and if we are smart we will begin now in Elul to maximize our results. But you'll notice that Yom Kippur is marked by Vidui (confession) that we recite no less than 9 times in 24 hrs. This is when the assignment is due!

Q: Lets examine the steps a bit. Maimonidies lists abandoning the mistake before regret? Is this always the logical order? When might regret come before abandonment?

Perhaps an obvious transgression is one where we can more easily feel regret first, while a habitual practice which we've become desensitized to may require quitting it before we can feel regret.

Q: Is it possible to seriously promise (resolve) never to do certain transgressions in the future, particularly pervasive one's like gossip?

Consider the following source:

SOURCE 6: *Parshas Vayeira 21:17 in Torah: “Fear not Hagar, G-d has accepted the cry (teshuva) of the youth (Ishmael) in his present state.”*

Even though Ishmael and his descendants would harass the Jewish people in the future, G-d judged him where he was at that moment.

G-d judges us where we are now, and if we really want to remove ourselves from a transgression our teshuva will be accepted, even if we fall back later.

Q: Confession seems so Christian. What's different about Jewish confession and why is so crucial in teshuva?

First, we confess to G-d not man and secondly, it helps make our resolution for the future "Real". Our word is our bottom line. (or should be!)

It's All in the Bag!

Teshuva is not for the faint of heart. But like anything that in life requires effort it's worth it. If you try, it's guaranteed to work.

FINAL SOURCES 7-9:

"If one **comes to purify** himself, **they (heaven) assist** him." (*Talmud Yoma 38b*)

"So, return to me, for I have **redeemed** you." (*Isaiah 44:22*)

"More than the calf wants to suckle, the mother wants to nurse." (*Talmud Pesachim 112a*)

Parents understand this, forgiveness and renewed closeness are in the bag. We just need our kids to come clean and come home. G-d is the ultimate parent, punching our ticket even before we've paid the fine!