

Shabbat Shuva Sermon

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We are now in the middle of Ten days of Teshuva, the 10 days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This Shabbat called Shabbat Shuva- because its in the days of Teshuva, but also because the Haftara that we are reading today, starting in the verse Shuva Adonai to your people- Israel.

So, let's speak a little about teshuvah—repentance or return. The Hebrew expression “to return in teshuvah” does not necessarily mean answering a question, which is the usual use of the word; rather, it comes from the verb to return, to come back. In fact, “returning in teshuvah” means returning again. An answer to a question, incidentally, is also a return: we return to the questioner with a response; we return to the questioner’s position

So, what is Teshuvah? We can understand it as a return to what is better—to goodness. This means that goodness is the original foundation to which we must return. In the book of Genesis it written, “God created the human beings in the divine image.” If a person was created in the image of God, then surely that .person was created good—even at the very height of goodness

It is true that Genesis chapter 8 says, “For the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth.” But the verse must be read in context, as God says: “Never again will I bring doom upon the world on account of what people do, though the human mind is inclined to evil from youth onward; never again will I destroy all living beings, as I have [just] done.”

At first glance, this is a contradiction: is God promising after the

Flood that will not happen again, **because the human heart is evil**? That makes no sense. Perhaps God has despaired of us and is giving up in advance?

Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch, founder of Modern Orthodoxy in Germany, offers the following interpretation, and I quote: “The commentators gave a wrong explanation to the continuation of the verse, ‘for the inclination of the human

heart is evil from youth.’ They saw this statement **as the reason** for the promise... Yet this clause is parenthetical: **even if the** inclination of the human heart should again become evil—even evil from youth—and the destruction of the generation were the only path to salvation, **nevertheless I will not again curse as I have done until now...**

Children are neither righteous nor wicked. Anyone who knows young people or children will admit: No, that is not true; youth is not corrupt. The inclination of the human heart **is not** evil from early childhood; a young person does not start out aspiring to evil.

Every morning prayer, I say: “My God, the soul You have given me is **pure!**” From that point of purity, innocence, and fundamental goodness, one can only move away. From the moment we become conscious human beings, we gradually grow more distant.

Kauffman Koehler, 2nd President of Hebrew Union College,
wrote in his work on Reform theology:

Judaism holds that the human soul came pure from its Maker, endowed with freedom, and untainted by any inborn evil or inherited sin. Therefore, by the power of free will, a person is capable of attaining, to an ever-increasing degree, intellectual, moral, and spiritual powers throughout history.

Fortunately, there are times when we can draw near again. And the answer to the **return again- But** we must question we raised at the beginning is: yes... we can remain alert, so as not to miss such an opportunity—one that does not come .every day.

”I sleep, but my heart is awake”

what a wonderful verse, isn’t it? From the Song of Songs, of course“.

A sound!! My beloved is knocking: Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one

The beloved' according to tradition, is God—asks; indeed, more than asks, **pleads** with God's beloved—according to tradition, God's beloved is the people of Israel—asking us to seize the opportunity and open the door.

.Song of Songs continues:

"For my head is filled with dew, my locks with the drops of the night" .

God is saying: I have been here for hours, waiting, refusing to give up.

But us? We have time

... The text continues:

I have taken off my garment; how can I put it on? I have washed my feet; "how can I soil them?"

"Wait. I need to get dressed. I need to wash up."

The text continues: My beloved put his hand through the opening, and my ".heart stirred for him

God even reaches the Divine hand, through the hatch in the door, perhaps hoping to lift the bolt from within.

...Our response:

"I arose to open to my beloved"

...well, thank you very much indeed—

My hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, upon the " ".handles of the bolt

... I still had time to perfume myself,

I opened to my beloved—but my beloved had turned away and gone. My "soul departed when he spoke; I looked for him, but I did not find him; I called him, but he did not answer me."

You missed the window of opportunity. Now get up and search for your beloved, for God. Perhaps you will find God, and perhaps you will not.

Hebrew poet Meir Ariel offers a metaphor to describe the consequence of not .
acting in a timely fashion:

The wagon rolls on. If you do not jump on today, you will be left behind.”

Such are the Days of Repentance: an opportunity—an opportunity to return.
True, it is not simple; it requires self-examination, but there is an opportunity
here.

Sometimes we want, or need, to return after a crisis.

Also, this year has been difficult, In Israel, In America, in the Jewish world.

So where do we return to now?

Rabbi Zusha of Anipoli said: “If they ask me in the World to Come, ‘Zusha, why
were you not like Moses-Moshe Rabeinu?’ I will not be afraid at all—for how
could I be compared to Moses our teacher? What I do fear is that they will ask
me, ‘Zusha, why were you not Zusha?’

There is somewhere to return to. After all, we agreed that the inclination of the
!human heart is good from youth, did we not? Let us return to ourselves

Israeli poet Yona Wallach wrote

**The life you have
is the life you have lived.
Look back with understanding.
Find the point of beginning—
creation.
Create yourself.
This is the best world,
the only one
you can create.
All of it lies within you.
Discover it.**

What qualities or values lie within a person, such that by returning to them, that person will become whole?

That same Zusha, one of the early Hasidic masters in eighteenth-century Galicia and a disciple of the Maggid of Mezrich, was asked: Zusha, what is teshuvah?

In his humility, Zusha of Anipoli replied that he knew only the initials of the Hebrew word teshuvah:

Tav — “Be Tamim- wholehearted with your God”

Wholeheartedness; innocence.

Shin — Shiviti- “I have set Adonai before me always”- You are always seen

Vav — Veahavta- “Love your neighbor as yourself”.

Bet — Bechol- “In all your ways acknowledge God”.

Heh — HATSNEA LECHET- “Walk humbly with your God”.

I pray for a better year. When the new year, 5787, is written out in Hebrew letters, it spells “Tashpaz,” which is not a Hebrew word, though the last part, Paz, means “fine gold.” With our Teshuvah... May it be TASHPAZ- a year of PAZ- gold and light...

Shanah Tovah