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The Teshuva Week

Rosh Hashanah's purpose was to disclose the intense earnestness of the demands made of us by the God of Sinai, and to show us the abundance of our bliss which already blossoms as the result of complying with these demands (תקיעה). Rosh Hashanah wants to warn us of the misery which is the inevitable result of apostasy (חרוטה).

Rosh Hashanah wants to show us the ever ready mercy of our God, Who beckons us to emerge from the deepest abyss to come toward Him, Who is always ready to restore us to a new and fresh purity and peace (תקיעה). The means of obtaining this purity and peace is called תשובה, return, and an entire week is dedicated to this Teshuva.

Who can truly portray the bliss of such a Teshuva-week in which the purposeful Jewish life finds full expression. Every altar of the אל זר within our heart, and every altar of the אל נכר in the home is overturned. All bonds of the unholy, all un-Jewish bonds are torn asunder. With the vigor of a newly awakened, newly strengthened free Divinely-inspired energy we cleanse our hearts, we purify and consecrate our lives so that God's splendor will once again reign within us.

Do you notice the joyful laughter of the youths and maidens? The animated look of young men and women, the elderly with their tranquil gaze? They have tasted the bliss of return, and the light of Teshuva radiates about them with a warm glow. They have measured and weighed their innermost thoughts and feelings, their sentiments and inclinations. Whatever was unable to meet God's criteria was to be banned from the sanctuary of their heart. The act which accomplished this transformation, from lies to truthfulness, from envy to human kindness, from hatred to love, from grudge to forgiveness, from lewdness to self-control, from laziness to diligence, from obstinacy to compliance, from arrogance to modesty, from conceit to humility, from vanity to earnestness is—*Teshuva*.

After a thorough introspection they asked, and tested, and searched, and weighed before God whether they had properly observed the parameters of holiness, and had utilized the means granted to them by a merciful God. They rebuilt the altar of purity, restored the spirit of consecration, and the task which accomplished this was—*Teshuva*. They looked into their family circle and examined and evaluated before God, their marriage, their functions as parents, the life of their children, their family life and their continued personal

growth. The husband evaluated his relationship with his wife, and the wife her relationship with her husband. Parents questioned their relationship with their children, and children scrutinized their relations with parents. Siblings examined their conduct toward each other, friends looked at their friendship, and comrades evaluated their companionship. The husband asked himself whether he had lived up to the full implication of the tiny word "לי" with which he entered into marriage. The wife asked herself whether she, with love and fidelity, with kindness and earnestness, had remained a true and loyal companion and friend? The spouses asked themselves whether they shared each other's hurt, rejoiced in each other's happiness, showed compassion for each other's pain.

The children looked into their hearts and evaluated their filial love and respect, the obedience and reverence which is owed to parents. Brothers and sisters asked themselves whether their hearts were mindful of each other, whether they cared for each other with the same love. Friends and neighbors examined themselves whether harmony, love, respect and consideration were practiced among them, attributes which are the most precious treasures of man.

They looked about and within themselves and tested before God their relationships in the larger circle of human beings with whom their business, their vocation and their trade brought them in contact. They tested, weighed and evaluated before God their business and professional conduct in order to determine whether they had committed any injustice or wrongdoing. They examined their lives in light of the admonition *כי תרעבה ה' אלקיך כל עשה אלה כל עשה על* (Deut 25,16).

They scrutinized the philosophical concepts which were responsible for their ideology.

Did they consider the honor, tranquility, welfare and justice of their fellow-men as a precious trust? Did they use language to curse the deaf, or put a stumbling-block in the path of the blind? They examined words and deeds which affected their human relations, asking themselves whether they conveyed a message of love and conciliation, of gentleness and mercy.

All this and more they asked themselves, and wherever they discovered a deviation from justice, they did not rest until the injustice was removed, until every unlawfully earned penny had been returned, surrendered what had been withheld, approached again those they had previously repudiated, gave support and help to the abandoned, forti-

fied justice and restored friendships. The act which helped them achieve this is called *Teshuva*.

They also looked at their communal life before God and tested and weighed the status of public Jewish life within their circle. Was the Jewish communal entity flourishing and achieving its purposes? Were Torah, Avodah and Gemiluth Chassodim being practiced as befits a Jewish community? Did God recognize as Torah that which was presented to them as Torah? Did God find עבודה in their Divine service, and was the ancient גמילות חסד still the charity they gave? Or had all this been abandoned?

They examined the Torah institutions of their community. They looked for those institutions which foster Torah for the adults. Above all they examined the institutions which are to mold the growing youth in the genuine nobleness of Torah blended with דרך ארץ. They asked themselves whether both תורה and דרך ארץ were well cared for. This engendered the hope that they would strengthen the youth and help them to lead an upright, God-pleasing Jewish life, rooted in the perfect foundation of the Torah.

They looked for the institutions of עבודה, which a community is responsible to establish, and obliged to support, for the implementation of their Torah-obligations. They examined the בית התפלה, the בית הכנסת and the בית השחיטה. Did they actually exist? Were they adequate? Did they fulfill their obligations and purposes?

Did the community consider itself accountable if it would find that the practical fulfillment of the Jewish law fell far short of its goal? They tested the establishments of גמילות חסדים in their midst. Did they still consider it the obligation of the entire Jewish community not to let an individual flounder? To assist the poor, the needy, the weak, the suffering and the sick, with united vigor? Was the pearl of Abraham's life, the hospitable love of men which welcomes into the home every stranger and passing traveller, still practiced by the community? Did they, with renewed earnestness, practice this Jewish love of men during a time when mounting needs and increasing anguish abound? If an unfortunate soul died in their midst could they and their elders wash their hands before God in the conviction: דינו לא שפכה את הדם הזה ועינינו לא ראו "Our hands have not shed this blood and our eyes have not seen him" (Deut. 21,7)?

The members of the community continued their self-examination to determine whether they were still animated by vigorous community

concerns which recognize each individual's responsibility for cooperation. They concluded that a congregation has not met its responsibilities merely by appointing functionaries and communal leaders. The communal spirit is responsible for the continued thriving and care of a Jewish congregation. To these tasks each individual was expected to devote the same attention that he devotes to the running of his private affairs.

The participation, the zeal, the earnestness, the united voice of the community members constitute the true foundation of a successful community. The community leaders, the rabbis, the teachers, and all those with community responsibilities, must ask themselves before God whether their activities were satisfactory and whether they dealt with communal affairs *לשם שמים*. Did they perform God's work *באמונה*, and did they deserve the continued trust of the community which had appointed them? They asked, tested and weighed, and wherever they discovered major flaws, they attempted to remedy them by a serious resolution to improve. The act which accomplished this is called—*Teshuva*.

The spirit which animated the elders, and the solemnity which inspired the leaders also kindled the zeal and the determination of the youth. They were inspired by the solemnity of the moment, and in their own childish way found the way to *Teshuva*. Transgressions for which they had reproached themselves during the year now became a heavy burden. They recognized, atoned for and overcame, obstinacy, laziness, quarrelsomeness, frivolity, defiance, and sundry other bad habits which are a blemish on the youthful character. Friends and schoolmates were appeased, parents and teachers were reconciled; the act of self-improvement is—*Teshuva*.

And, because they did *Teshuva*, they understood the solemnity of Rosh Hashanah. It also became clear to them that a few hours spent in prayer did not constitute a fulfillment of their task. The spirit of acceptance of holy Divine responsibilities matures during the span of a lifetime. Therefore, full of hope they approach Yom Kippur which completes the *Teshuva*-process and places it before God.

Yom Kippur

Indeed, only after such a *Teshuva* process does Yom Kippur approach in truth and splendor. *יהי"כ מכפר לשבים ואינו מכפר לשאינן שבים*.