

שבת תשובה

T'SHUVAH IS THE HEBREW WORD THAT MEANS “RETURN OR REPENT.” *Yom Teruah* (The Feast of Trumpets), the first day of the Hebrew seventh month, begins a ten-day period until the 10th of *Tishrei*, i.e., until *Yom Kippur* (the Feast of Atonement). These ten days are known as *Yamim Nora'im*, that is, the ten days of awe. The *Shabbat* that falls within this ten-day period is called *Shabbat T'Shuvah*, the *Shabbat* of return or of repentance or of answering (since *t'shuvah* also means “to answer” in Hebrew).

According to Jewish thought, without the possibility of repentance (*T'Shuvah*), the world could not exist, because—as our common experience makes all too clear—man stumbles more than he strides. If there were no possibility of wiping the slate clean, man could have no hope of rising above his frequent sins. They would always remain to condemn him, never allowing him to escape inevitability of judgment and punishment. For this reason *T'shuvah* had to be created before the universe, for *Elohim* would not create a world that was doomed from its inception (see *Revelation 13:8* and *Nedarim 39b*). In Jewish tradition the possibility of repentance always exists—in fact, it must exist—and it is uniquely acceptable during the ten days of awe. During this period, *Elohim* waits—anxiously and expectantly, as it were—for the Jewish people and the Jewish person to return to His embrace. He is more responsive at this time, He assists those groping for His closeness, and He regards our failure to respond to this opportunity as transgression of an uncommon magnitude.

It is also our people's tradition that those that are neither inscribed in the Book of Life nor in the Book of the Wicked have 10 days to repent: “As for one who is evenly balanced between good and bad deeds, his fate is suspended until *Yom Kippur*. If he repents, he is sealed for life, and if not he is sealed for death” (in the words of Rambam in *Rosh HaShanah 17a*). It is clear from the Talmud that repentance during these ten days has a special dimension, and that it can accomplish during this period what it cannot at other times of the year. However, the commandment to repent is constant; it is equally binding at all times!

The special quality of the Ten Days of Repentance is that *Elohim* is accessible, He is near. We who are Messianic Jews have even more access through Messiah Yeshua's Atonement on our behalf. Should we not take advantage on Shabbat T'Shuvah to draw close to Him and make complete peace with our Maker?

¹²So the Torah is holy; that is, the commandment is holy, just and good. ¹³Then did something good become for me the source of death? Heaven forbid! Rather, it was sin working death in me through something good, so that sin might be clearly exposed as sin, so that sin through the commandment might come to be experienced as sinful beyond measure. ¹⁴For we know that the Torah is of the Spirit; but as for me, I am bound to the old nature, sold to sin as a slave. ¹⁵I don't understand my own behavior—I don't do what I want to do; instead, I do the very thing I hate! ¹⁶Now if I am doing what I don't want to do, I am agreeing that the Torah is good. ¹⁷But now it is no longer “the real me” doing it, but the sin housed inside me. ¹⁸For I know that there is nothing good housed inside me—that is, inside my old nature. I can want what is good, but I can't do it! ¹⁹For I don't do the good I want; instead, the evil that I don't want is what I do! ²⁰But if I am doing what “the real me” doesn't want, it is no longer “the real me” doing it but the sin housed inside me. ²¹So I find it to be the rule, a kind of perverse “Torah”, that although I want to do what is good, evil is right there with me! ²²For in my inner self I completely agree with *Elohim's* Torah; ²³but in my various parts, I see a different “Torah”, one that battles with the Torah in my mind and makes me a prisoner of sin's “Torah”, which is operating in my various parts. ²⁴What a miserable creature I am! Who will rescue me from this body bound for death? ²⁵Thanks be to *Elohim*, he will!—through Yeshua the Messiah, our Lord! To sum up: with my mind, I am a slave of *Elohim's* Torah; but with my old nature, I am a slave of sin's “Torah” (*Rom 7:12-25*).

Come close to *Elohim*, and he will come close to you. Clean your hands, sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded people! (*James 4:8*)

Parashat VaYelech – And He Went...

Moshe went and spoke the following words to all Isra'el: "I am 120 years old today. I can't get around any longer; moreover, יהוה has said to me, 'You will not cross this Yarden.' יהוה your Elohim - he will cross over ahead of you. He will destroy these nations ahead of you, and you will dispossess them. Y'hoshua - he will cross over ahead of you, as יהוה has said. יהוה will do to them what he did to Sichon and 'Og, the kings of the Emori, and to their land - he destroyed them. יהוה will defeat them ahead of you, and you are to do to them just as I have ordered you to do. Be strong, be bold, don't be afraid or frightened of them, for יהוה your Elohim is going with you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you." Next Moshe summoned Y'hoshua and, in the sight of all Isra'el, said to him, "Be strong, be bold, for you are going with this people into the land יהוה swore to their ancestors he would give them. You will be the one causing them to inherit it. But יהוה - it is he who will go ahead of you. He will be with you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you, so don't be afraid or downhearted." Then Moshe wrote down this Torah and gave it to the cohanim, the descendants of Levi who carried the ark with the covenant of יהוה, and to all the leaders of Isra'el. Moshe gave them these orders: "At the end of every seven years, during the festival of Sukkot in the year of sh'mittah, when all Isra'el have come to appear in the presence of יהוה at the place he will choose, you are to read this Torah before all Isra'el, so that they can hear it. Assemble the people - the men, the women, the little ones and the foreigners you have in your towns - so that they can hear, learn, fear יהוה your Elohim and take care to obey all the words of this Torah; and so that their children, who have not known, can hear and learn to fear יהוה your Elohim, for as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Yarden to possess." יהוה said to Moshe, "The time is coming for you to die. Summon Y'hoshua, and present yourselves in the tent of meeting, so that I can commission him." Moshe and Y'hoshua went and presented themselves in the tent of meeting. יהוה appeared in the tent in a column of cloud; the column of cloud stood above the entrance to the tent. (Deut 31:16,19)

Have you ever wondered which is the last of the 613 *mitzvot* in the *Torah*? It is *D'varim 31:19* or the 15th positive *mitzvah* listed in *Sefer HaMitzvot*. This is absolutely important based on the law of first and last mention. (In review: the first and last mention of a principle in Scripture carries with it additional meaning or significance, and we should therefore pay close attention to it). The sages derive from this verse that every Jew is commanded to write a *Torah* scroll, a commandment that can be fulfilled according to the Rabbis, "by writing a single letter of a complete scroll, because the lack of even one letter renders a scroll invalid. The writing or correcting of a single letter is tantamount to completing the entire scroll" (Rambam, *Sefer Torah 7:1*). According to some Rabbis the purchase of books expounding on the *Torah* (e.g., a *Chumash* or *Tanach*) constitutes a fulfillment of this *mitzvah*. The climax of the entire series of *mitzvot* (613 of them) is to record and know יהוה's commands, so that they can be fulfilled and passed on to succeeding generations.

יהוה commanded Moshe and Jehoshua to write the *Torah* and to teach it to the people, and to place the scroll inside the Ark. Times would come when the masses would forsake the *Torah* and be drawn after the cultures of the surrounding societies, but that written *Torah* would remain as a constant reminder of Israel's roots and the unchanging focus of its devotion.

Why a Song? Jews always chant Deut. 32, *Parashat Haazinu*, it and it is written in the form of a poetic verse (Rambam). Some Rabbis teach that it is a song because "a song" implies the concept of harmony, in that people recognize that all elements of the universe fuse in carrying out יהוה's will, just as all the notes in the score of a complex song, all the instruments of an orchestra, and all the voices in a choir join in harmonious cooperation to create a song, as opposed to the disjointed noise that results from the failure of the notes, instruments, and voices to harmonize properly. Israel is shown how all parts of Creation respond harmoniously to the sins and good deeds of יהוה's people. The commandment to teach the *Torah* demonstrates the obligation for Jews (and believers also!) to behave in a way that will bring credit upon Israel to such a degree that onlookers will be inspired to join them (ArtScroll *Chumash* pp. 1097)

יהוה said to Moshe, "You are about to sleep with your ancestors. But this people will get up and offer themselves as prostitutes to the foreign Elohim of the land where they are going. When they are with those Elohim, they

will abandon me and break my covenant which I have made with them. Then my anger will flare up, and I will abandon them and hide my face from them. They will be devoured, and many calamities and troubles will come upon them. Then they will ask, 'Haven't these calamities come upon us because our Elohim isn't here with us?' But I will be hiding my face from them because of all the evil they will have done in turning to other Elohim. "Therefore, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the people of Isra'el. Have them learn it by heart, so that this song can be a witness for me against the people of Isra'el." For when I have brought them into the land I swore to their ancestors, flowing with milk and honey; and they have eaten their fill, grown fat and turned to other Elohim, serving them and despising me, and broken my covenant; then, after many calamities and troubles have come upon them, this song will testify before them as a witness, because their descendants will still be reciting it and will not have forgotten it. For I know how they think even now, even before I have brought them into the land about which I swore." So Moshe wrote this song that same day and taught it to the people of Isra'el (Deut 31:16-22)

Notice also that our children will carry forth *Torah* if we make it a priority. Elohim said: “for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their offspring.” (because their descendants will still be reciting it and will not have forgotten it). What better reason to study and know *Torah* — יְהוָה, 's wish!

And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this Torah in a scroll, until they were finished, That Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of יְהוָה, saying, Take this Torah scroll (book of the Torah), and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of יְהוָה your Elohim, that it may be there for a witness against thee. For I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against יְהוָה; and how much more after my death? Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of יְהוָה, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands. And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended. (Deut 31:24-30)

Deuteronomy 32 is the “Song” which Adonai gave to Moshe in the previous chapter. In it, Moshe calls heaven and earth to bear witness to the calamities that will befall Israel (and us!) if it sins—and the ultimate joy that will come with the final redemption. In Revelation 15:33 *They were singing the song of Moshe, the servant of Elohim, and the song of the Lamb...*

Escuchad cielos y hablaré. Y oigan los cielos los dichos de mi boca...

Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: Because I will publish the name of יְהוָה: ascribe ye greatness unto our Elohim. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a Elohim of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he. They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation. Do ye thus requite יְהוָה, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee? Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee (Deut 32:1-7)

Moshe appointed heaven and earth, which are eternal, to be witnesses that would outlive his and later generations. These are witnesses who would testify against us if we deny that we accepted the covenant of *Torah*! These witnesses will also take the lead in administering the appropriate punishment for such denials, for the heaven would withhold its rain and the earth its produce. By the way, from Deut. 32:3 the Talmud derives the portion of Shema “*Baruch shem kevod, malchuto, leolam vaed*”— ascribe greatness to Him!