

A Call to Action on Shabbat T'Shuvah

“Seek ye יחזק while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto יחזק, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our Elohim, for he will abundantly pardon.’ (Isaiah 55:6,7) When does this apply to an individual? Rabbah bar Avuhah said: These are the ten days (of awe) between *Yom Teruah* and *Yom Kippur*” (Rosh Hashanah 18a).

The ten days between *Yom Teruah* and *Yom Kippur* are known as the *Ten Days of Awe* (*Yamim Nora'im*, literally, the 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, that is, today.

Repentance is a Necessary Gift

Without the possibility of repentance 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 Repentance had to be created before the universe, for God would not create a world that was doomed from its inception (see *Revelation* 13:8). In Jewish thought 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, God waits (anxiously and expectantly, as it were) for His people 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 Jewish 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 Jewish writings 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. But they are quick to add that the commandment to repent is constant; it is equally binding at all times!

In Jewish – The 24 sins that create a great spiritual divide between God and sinners

- A. Four sins so great that God blocks the sinner's way toward repentance:
 1. Causing the multitude to sin or preventing them from performing a commandment
 2. Enticing an individual to sin
 3. Standing idly while one's child (or anyone else he can influence) slides into the path of sin
 4. One who says, “I will repent later” or “I will sin and *Yom Kippur* will atone for me”
- B. Five sins or attitudes that, by their very nature, stand in the way of repentance, because they make it very difficult for the sinner to accept the need to repent or to heed the admonition to do so:
 1. One who separates himself from the community
 2. One who disputes the wise men from his time
 3. One who disparages (depreciates, belittles or discredits) the commandments
 4. One who insults his teachers
 5. One who hates admonitions
- C. Five sins that prevent someone from repenting, because these sins involve other people, and the sinner will not know of whom he must beg forgiveness or to whom he must return property:
 1. One who curses a crowd, so that he does not know to whom to apologize
 2. One who shares in stolen goods, without knowing the victim
 3. One who does not announce or return stolen property
 4. One who persecutes the poor and the homeless, who remain anonymous
 5. One who accepts bribes, so he cannot know the extent of his miscarriage of justice

- D. Five sins from which it is difficult to repent because the violator considers them so trivial that they are not even sins:
1. One who eats from a meal that does not suffice for his hosts
 2. One who uses the security deposit of poor people
 3. One who looks at immoral and obscene displays, and deludes himself into feeling that he has not committed an immoral act.
 4. One who glorifies himself through a disparaging comparison with another person, even though his comrade was not present to suffer embarrassment
 5. One who suspects another unjustly
- E. Five sins that entice the transgressor to commit them constantly and that become irresistible to him:
1. Gossip-mongering
 2. Slander
 3. Anger
 4. Harboring evil thoughts
 5. Associating with the wicked

If it is true that these sins make a great chasm between the Jewish people and God, what can deliver the Jew? How can a Jewish person draw near unto God? If God is accessible during these days, and if He is nearer, then we who are Messianic Jews have even more access to God through Messiah Yeshua's Atonement. *"So then, the Torah is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? God Forbid! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful. For we know that the Torah is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Torah, confessing that the Torah is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, in the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thank God through Messiah Yeshua our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin" (Rom 7:12-25). "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (James 4:8).*

Can we not take advantage on *Shabbat T'Shuvah* to draw close to Him and make complete peace with our Maker and with each other?