

The Sound of Teshuvah

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The world around us is mired in sameness. Mankind is stuck in the behaviors and patterns it has adapted for itself. President Obama calls together the Israeli Prime Minister and sits him together with the leader of the Palestinian authority and scolds them like errant children. President Obama so believes in words, especially his own, that he believes he can create and fashion the future of history. In fact President Obama, in particular, and western thinking, in general, have been mired in the trap of focusing on solutions rather than process, on destination rather than the journey. Mankind yearns for simple solutions and quick conflict resolution in the best of times. Yet in times of insecurity and confusion it is more easily drawn down that futile path of simplified solutions. It is especially in such times that individuals and leaders arise and speak in comforting sound bites and with packaged metaphors. Such leaders, in such times, can become formidable foes of complicated and layer-deep truths. President Obama has become such a leader.

Process and Journey is the only solution in a reality wherein truth and falsehood are so intertwined. That awareness is so needed in our complicated and self centered world. That is the secret of Teshuvah. Teshuvah is has been wrongly translated as Repentance. Teshuvah is a concept that is so much deeper and more liberating. Repentance entails an awareness of one's shortcomings and a decision to reverse one's mode of contact. As a result it is a concept intrinsically linked with sadness, regret and remorse. Teshuvah on the other hand is characterized by joy.

The concept of Teshuvah means "Return". Returning to one's essence. Returning to the point where one senses again the breath of G-d in our souls. Returning to the harmonious point where change can truly blossom and grow. Tshuva does not come from the point of solution and destination. It begins at the point of return into one's inner power and Divinely inspired strength. It is a return to the point of beginning again. That return becomes the impetus for the journey and it is only such a journey that will truly bring about change.

Israel is in the midst of the ten days that are imbued with the power and song of Tshuva. That is the sense that one feels all around in all levels and communities in this country. The sound of Tshuva is in the very breeze blowing through this land. You feel it in the air. It electrifies the soul and empowers the faint of heart. Yet in order to be impacted one must decide to listen for the sound and to open one's heart to make room for its impact.

At the Western wall, close to the center of the spiritual universe one can simply sit and absorb it all.

One can just sit and feel the sound of Teshuvah washing over them like a refreshing ocean spray.. The soul soars to the sound of the Sephardic groups singing their selichot prayers with hopeful and assured joy. Your soul deepens to the sound of the melancholy selichot of the Ashkenazi groups. Next to you some individual out lets out a heartfelt sigh crying

out , "Oy Tatteh" (Oy Father) and your heart opens. Small children who have made the trip up to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv holding on to their paper Kotel Kippas, sheepishly approach the wall and place a kiss on the ancient stones and your heart is made whole. The collective song of Teshuvah is a melody that raises the individual beyond his capabilities and offers release from one's private limitations.

The people of Israel, during these days are being lifted by the collective song of Tshuva and are being transported further through the journey of Destiny. It is the power found in the answer of the Shunamite woman to the prophet, " I dwell among mine own people." (2Kings 4:13) . When one looks at the individuals around us we see imperfections and failings. Yet when one focuses on the collective journey and yearnings of this ancient people and dwells spiritually "among them" then the individual is lifted up. The collective song of Teshuvah becomes the individual song of each soul.

The leaders of the world would do well if they too, looked deeper into themselves. Perhaps they too will learn to hear the divine song of Teshuvah ..