

Day One***Adapted from the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe by Rabbi Yanki Tauber***

The first ten days of the Jewish calendar are known as “the ten days of *teshuvah*.” These are days for soul-searching, repentance and return (*teshuvah*) to G-d. Citing the verse, “Seek G-d when He may be found, call upon Him when He is near,” the Talmud states: “these are the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.”

Actually, this ten-day period *includes* Rosh Hashanah, which occurs on the first and second days of the month of Tishrei, as well as Yom Kippur, which falls on the tenth of Tishrei. This means that while Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are themselves days of *teshuvah*, they each embody a principle that goes beyond the concept of “return”: the essence of Rosh Hashanah precedes *teshuvah*, while the essence of Yom Kippur supersedes *teshuvah*. Thus, the ten days of *teshuvah* include the days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and, at the same time, are “the ten days *between* Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.”

The Virtue in Sin

The people of Israel are G-d’s intimates—“the nation close to Him.” What is the nature of this relationship? There are three fundamental aspects to our bond with G-d and the manner in which it is expressed in our lives.

On the most basic level, we achieve connection with G-d through our observance of the mitzvot, the divine commandments (indeed, the word *mitzvah* also means “connection”). The mitzvot embody the will of G-d; by fulfilling the mitzvot, we make the divine will the substance and aim of our lives. Our souls and bodies become vehicles of the supernal will.

But when a Jew violates the divine will, G-d forbid, he uncovers an even deeper dimension of his bond with G-d. The connection created by the mitzvah is exactly that—a connection *created* between two separate entities. Taken on its own, this connection does not point to any intrinsic bond between the two. In fact, it implies that the natural state of the observer of the mitzvah is one of separateness and distinction—a state which is overcome by the act of the mitzvah, which bridges the gulf between the mortal and the divine. But when a Jew transgresses a divine command, a more innate bond with G-d comes to light. His inner equilibrium is disturbed; his soul finds no peace and is driven to compensate for its ravaged identity by profane spiritual quests, material excesses, or both. His transgressions highlight the fact that there is nothing more *unnatural* than a Jew estranged from his G-d.

Teshuvah is a soul’s experience of the agony of disconnection and its channeling of this agony to drive its return to G-d. Thus, our sages have said that through *teshuvah*, “sins are transformed into merits,” since the sin itself becomes the impetus for connection with G-d. Indeed, the *baal teshuvah* (penitent or “returnee”) attains a level of relationship with G-d on which “even the perfectly righteous cannot stand.” His sins have provoked—and his *teshuvah* has actualized—a dimension of his soul’s connection to G-d which a perfectly righteous life never touches.

The Singular Day

But there exists an even deeper unity between a Jew and G-d. The mitzvah relates to the level on which the finite and mortal nature of man sets him apart from the divine—a nature that the mitzvah comes to overcome. The transgression makes the opposite point—that connection with G-d is the natural state of the Jew—by its very dissevering of this connection, with *teshuvah* being the consequential effort to restore the natural bond. What both the above relationships have in common is that they allow for the possibility of disconnection. Ultimately, however, the quintessential bond between the Jew and G-d is immutable. On the deepest level of our being, there can be no disconnection, “natural” or “unnatural.”

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Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur Begins: 6:56 pm

Yom Kippur Ends: 7:55 pm

This underlying unity is the root from which the other two levels of connection stem. Every time a Jew does a mitzvah, he draws from this quintessential unity with G-d the power to overcome his “natural” apartness and connect to G-d through the fulfillment of His will. Every time he sins and experiences the agony of disconnection from G-d, this is but another expression of the fact that, in essence, he is one with his Creator. And it is this unity with G-d that empowers him to restore his relationship with G-d—on the level on which his transgressions do affect it—through the process of *teshuvah*.

These, however, are only *expressions* of a deeper truth, glimmers of unity rising to the surface of a life that is perceptively distinct and apart. But one day each year, the Jew’s quintessential oneness with G-d shines forth in all its glory. This day is Yom Kippur, which the Torah refers to as “the ‘one’ of the year.” Yom Kippur is more than a day of *teshuvah*. *Teshuvah*, “return,” implies that, in the interim, one has been somewhere else; Yom Kippur is a day on which we are empowered to actualize that dimension of our selves whose unity with G-d has never been disturbed in the first place. Thus, our sages say that on Yom Kippur, “the essence of the days atones”—on this day, we achieve atonement for our sins not only by transforming them into the dynamics of “return,” but (also) by uncovering that element of self never touched by sin.

Basis and End

During the “ten days of *teshuvah*,” G-d makes Himself more accessible to man—on all three levels of connection discussed above. It is a period in which special mitzvot are commanded to us (sounding the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah, fasting on Yom Kippur, etc.), opening unique avenues of connection to G-d via the fulfillment of His will. It is a period of heightened opportunity for *teshuvah*—a time when our souls are more sensitive to the break from G-d caused by our transgressions and more driven to “return.” But the foundation and end of all connection with G-d is the quintessential bond which requires no deed to effect it and which no deed can affect. In the ten days of *teshuvah*, the foundation is laid on Rosh Hashanah and the end attains its ultimate realization on Yom Kippur.

The defining quality of Rosh Hashanah is that it is the day we crown G-d as king over us. What does it mean that we accept G-d as our “king”? The king/subject metaphor is one of many employed by the Torah to describe our relationship with G-d, which is also referred to in terms of the relationships between man and wife, shepherd and flock, master and disciple, among others. The king/subject relationship is unique in that it is not defined by equivocal criteria (love, nurture, intellectual appreciation, etc.), but rather involves the abnegation of the subject’s very self to the sovereign. On Rosh Hashanah we relate to G-d as our king, affirming our bond to Him as the very essence of our identity.

But our acceptance of G-d as king is also the basis for our other levels of connection with G-d—mitzvot and *teshuvah*. The concept of a “divine commandment” has meaning only after one has accepted G-d as the authority over one’s life; a transgression is a transgression only because it violates a divine command, and *teshuvah* is spurred by transgression.

Thus, the ten days of *teshuvah* are defined as the “days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.” They are preceded by “Rosh Hashanah” (the concept, not the days, which are themselves part of the ten), since our submission to the divine sovereignty is the basis for the “ten days of *teshuvah*.” And they are superseded by “Yom Kippur,” since Yom Kippur, in addition to itself being a day of *teshuvah*, is the ultimate realization of the soul’s quintessential oneness with G-d.

Based on the Rebbe’s talks, Tishrei 5723 (October, 1962)

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