

Yom Tov T'shuvah and Tzedek Inspirations

During the High Holydays it is our practice to meet in 'chevruta' with others for study. We offer this sample of traditional and contemporary reflections as we approach the High Holyday season. The Rosh Hashanah Mahzor contains more ideas for contemplation and discussion.

T'shuvah is one of the ultimate spiritual realities at the core of Jewish faith. Its significance goes far beyond the narrow meaning of contrition or regret over error. It is considered fundamental to the existence of the world. Some include t'shuvah among the entities created before the world itself, embedded in the root structure of the universe!

- ❖ *T'shuvah is a manifestation of the divine within us. Through t'shuvah, we can extricate ourselves from the binding web of our lives, from the chain of causality that otherwise compels us to follow a path of no return.*
- ❖ Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble. (Congressman John Lewis)
- ❖ *Forgiveness is a strange thing. It can sometimes be easier to forgive our enemies than our friends. It can be hardest of all to forgive people we love. Like all of life's important coping skills, the ability to forgive and the capacity to let go of resentments most likely take root very early in our lives. (Fred Rogers)*
- ❖ When you have no choice, summon the spirit of courage. (Proverb)
- ❖ *It is forbidden to be cruel and refuse to be appeased. Be generous with forgiveness and slow to anger. When someone offends you and asks forgiveness, forgive whole heartedly and eagerly. If the offense happened many times, still do not hold onto anger and seek revenge.*
- ❖ Everybody wants to laugh - you know that. They need to laugh... people need to laugh. (Carl Reiner)
- ❖ *Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it. (Talmud)*
- ❖ A man lost in a forest wandered for several days trying to find a way out. He saw another walking toward him "Now" he thought "I'll learn the way out". He asked the man, "I've been lost for several days, can you show me the way out". The stranger replied, "I'm lost, too and don't know the way out. Let's try together to find the right way out". So it is with us, The *Baal Shem Tov* spoke. The road we've traveled so far will only lead us astray. Let us join together to discover the right way. (Hasidic Tale)
- ❖ *If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I? And if not now, when? Hillel the Elder Pirkei Avot Ethics of the Fathers)*
- ❖ We need to celebrate the holiness in our everyday lives. Each person should determine if her or his business decisions bring holiness into the world. Consider the holiness of our words and actions. (R. Rachel Esserman *The Women's Torah Commentary*)
- ❖ The pursuit of justice is not a passive one; sometimes, as our image reminds us, we must be prepared to fight for justice. We cannot wait for justice to "flow like a mighty river" (Amos 5:24); we must turn the tide ourselves.