

# T'shuvah - The Spiritual Practice of Return

Rabbi Marcia Prager

According to Jewish tradition it is customary to blow the Shofar from Rosh Hodesh (the New Moon) of the month of Elul until the day before Rosh Hashana so that the people will be aroused to prayer and t'shuvah. T'shuvah, of course, literally, means "return." Spiritually "return" is a process of re-alignment with the Divine Presence within us and around us, and with family and community.

We each can make for ourselves a daily "fixed time" for t'shuvah - a regularized practice of engaging in the spiritual work of re-alignment. Then t'shuvah becomes a regular feature of our lives, a daily spiritual work out that we can use as kind of "Soul Yoga".

The process of t'shuvah is an ongoing one. As any yoga practitioner knows, a once-in-a-while workout does not produce a yogi. So too, without regular spiritual practice we can't expect very high results. We live in a culture that places so many demands on us in the material world, that it can become very difficult to regularize any spiritual practices at all. From a Jewish point of view, this is dangerous for individuals and society.

Sometimes, from the outside, Jewish tradition may seem like an array of "rules." But from the inside, we discover inspired guidance for a life rich in soul-stretching spiritual practices. These interact synergistically to elasticize and tone our capacities to be vessels of Godliness.

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The great Christian mystic Meister Eckart taught: "Know that the eye through which you see God is the same eye through which God sees you." T'shuvah asks of us that we take our own eye, which is the eye of God, and search our souls. We are urged to make a regular practice of carving out a special time for hitbodedut, (seclusion, alone-ness with self) and t'shuvah (soul searching and re-alignment) during which time we are immersed in holiness, with no distractions. Rabbi Elija deVidas writes:

Try to separate yourself and be alone with God one day each month...strive for a state of devekut (clinging to God with passionate arousal and longing); review all your behavior, pray and study. Avoid any conversations about business. Try to fully immerse yourself in the mitzvah / spiritual practice of devekut, and the mitzvah of "do not turn to anything partial, anything 'less-than-the-whole' and make that into your God. " (Totzaot Hayim)

An invitation: Make it a custom to spend some time in a state of t'shuvah every day, especially before any prayer or study, and also before going to sleep. Each of us, in our own private words, can do some rigorous soul-work, without any self-righteousness or defensive posturing. You can integrate time for soul-review and return into your daily life!

Remember that t'shuvah should not be a descent into self-degradation, self-scorn, or destructive self-criticism. As a disciple of the great Seer of Lublin taught: "When you pray about t'shuvah express your hopes! Come into a state of t'shuvah in joy and expansiveness of spirit! Not from sadness, stress and feelings of impoverishment. (Menorat Zahav)

You can remind yourself every day that your neshama, the soul that you are, is pure and good, like a holy spark. No matter what layers of tarnish life's hurts and errors may have layered on, your inner goodness is still shining inside, ready to guide you.

Shanah Tovah!