

A CALENDAR OF REPENTANCE FOR THE MONTH OF ELLUL

WEEK 4 – *Teshuvah* – Returning

22nd – 28th September/ 22-28 Ellul, 5779

Sunday 22nd September
22 Ellul 5779

Hear our voice...

Hear our voice, Eternal One our God; have compassion upon us, and accept our prayer with favour and mercy. Help us to return to You, O God; then we shall return. Renew our days as in the past. (*Machzor Ruach Chadashah*, page 203)

This notion of ‘teshuvah’ – ‘returning’ or ‘repentance’ lies at the heart of the forthcoming festivals of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. But what does it mean to ‘return’ or to ‘repent’?

To feel regret and remorse for the past, to attempt to transform ourselves, to bring change to the world in which we live?

And what about our return to God? What does that mean to us? What is God? A transcendent Being? A force for good? The breath of all existence?

These days bring an urgency to our cry, ‘Hear our voice.’ When there is so little strength left in us, then we must rely on God’s favour and mercy.

Monday 23rd September
23 Ellul, 5779

Although the sounding of the *shofar* on the New Year is a decree of the Written Law, still it has a deep meaning, as if saying, ‘Awake, awake, O sleeper, from your sleep; O slumberers arouse yourself from your slumbers; examine your deeds, return in repentance, and remember your Creator...’

Jews are accustomed to give more to charity and perform other good deeds from the New Year to the Day of Atonement and engage in meritorious actions during this period to a greater degree than during the rest of the year (*Hilchot Teshuvah, Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides).

Tuesday 24th September

24 Ellul, 5779

‘I am moved by the beauty of our Yom Kippur liturgy, by the way it uses biblical quotations to exhort us to return to God, by the way it gives expression to the poverty of humanity’s attributes compared to the might and compassion of God. But the image of man as an arrogant, deceitful, hard-hearted, authoritarian, lustful, malevolent and ambitious creature does not necessary embrace those sins and weaknesses that I find in myself, and that I imagine other women might wish to confess. For what are our over-riding sins? They are the sins of self-deprecation and excessive guilt, of failing to acknowledge the validity of our feelings; of holding back from speaking out when we are treated condescendingly or with contempt. We confess our the sin of allowing ourselves to be oppressed, of being discouraged from exerting our authority, of being embarrassed by our age or our sex, or our jobs and roles; and for the sins we have committed by hurting our fellow-women and men in any way’ (*Forms of Prayer for Jewish Worship*, Volume 2, 1995).

Wednesday 25th September

25 Ellul, 2019

Those ideologies and institutions that alienate us from ourselves and link us with others in relationships of domination and subordination militate against our spirituality on every level. In a sexist, hererosexist, anti-Semitic, class-ridden, and racist world, politics becomes the necessary work we do to make the world safe for the full realization and embodiment of spirituality (Judith Plaskow, *Standing again at Sinai*, page 213).

It is possible to live out our spiritual values in activism. But we need to be attentive to our spirituality in order to sustain that activism or we will become exhausted and lose the impetus for change and transformation.

‘Do we need to be more openly courageous, more honest?’

We need to take this crisis as an opportunity to get more real with each other, deepen our connections with each other. Love more openly. Listen more attentively’ (Hilary Totterman)

Thursday 26th September**26 Ellul, 2019**

Do not say that one need only repent of sinful deeds such as fornication, robbery and theft. Just as person needs to repent of these sins involving acts, so they need to investigate and repent of any evil dispositions that they may have, such as hot temper, hatred, jealousy, scoffing, eager pursuit of wealth or honours, greediness in eating, and so on. Of all these faults one should repent. They are graver than sinful acts; for when one is addicted to them it is difficult to give them up. And thus it is said, 'Let the wicked forsake their way and the human being of iniquity their thoughts' (Isaiah 55:7).

(Maimonides, *Hilchot Teshuvah, Mishneh Torah* 7:3)

Friday 27th September**27 Ellul, 5779****From 'The Tapestry of Jewish Time' by Nina Beth Cardin**

Some people seek forgiveness face-to-face. Some find it easier to write a letter. Others may want to give the aggrieved a gift to do them a favour, all in the context of apologising and making amends. Asking forgiveness may take many guises. But its one common element is that it must be intentional. Both parties must be aware of what is at stake. There is no such thing as accidental or casual forgiveness.

Shabbat 28th September**28 Ellul, 5779**

You stand this day, all of you, before the Eternal One your God – you tribal heads, you elders, and you officials, all the men of Israel, you children, you women, even the stranger within your camp, from woodchopper to water drawer – to enter into the covenant of the Eternal One your God, which the Eternal One is concluding with you this day, with its sanctions; in order to establish you this day as God's people and in order to be your God, as promised you and as sworn to your fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I make this covenant, with its sanctions, not with you alone, but both with those who are standing here with us this day before the Eternal One our God and with those who are not with us here this day (Deuteronomy 29:9-14).

As we prepare ourselves for Rosh Hashanah, let us interrogate ourselves about our commitment to the covenant made with Israel at Sinai? What is the strength of our faithfulness to Judaism and to this covenant made with our ancestors? What are the changes we are going to make this Rosh Hashanah as we enter a new year?

