

“And I will conceal My face from them...it will say on that day, ‘Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?’” (31:17)

The *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, Ten Days of Repentance, the first ten days of the New Year, are meant to be the foundation-stone for the coming year. It is the standard upon which our behavior during the year should be based. Hashem is *karov*, close, to us during this time. Thus, this period should imbue us to develop a personal relationship with the Almighty – throughout the year. There is no room in *Yiddishkeit* for intermediaries. One should feel a sense of nearness with Hashem. Consequently, no Jew should ever feel alone. This idea is alluded to in the Divine warning conveyed to Moshe *Rabbeinu* shortly before he bade farewell to the nation that he had cared for during these past forty years. The time would come when the people would say, “because my G-d is not in my midst,” when they would no longer feel Hashem’s presence among them.

Our first error is in thinking that Hashem has left us. Hashem is always there. It is we who have turned away. The *Navi* emphasizes, “And know that I am in the midst of *Yisrael*.” I have not turned away My face; you have turned yours away. Come back, return to Me. Do not be ashamed. Return to *Davening*, to *Tallis* and *Tefillin*, to Torah study, to *Shabbos*. You can still walk hand in hand with Hashem as long as you perform *teshuvah*, repentance.

Shuvah, simply put, means to return. If you turn your back on someone, you have simply to turn around and look him in the face. During the Ten Days of Repentance we are enjoined to “turn around and face Hashem.”

Teshuvah is never easy, but when one realizes that Hashem is waiting to accept his return, it becomes that much easier. It must be made clear, however, that this only applies to sins that one has committed against the Almighty. For the sins that we have committed against our fellowman, there is only one way out: find the victim of our transgression and beg his forgiveness. If he is no longer in this world, we must take a *minyan*, quorum of ten men, to his grave and make a public confession. It is not pleasant, but we never know when our time is up. So, why wait?

It is a serious mistake to think that we can conduct ourselves during the day as we see fit, as long as we go to *shul*, *daven*, maintain a *chavrusa*, study partner, and give charity. The malignancy that eats away at religious life is our attitude towards separating the sacred from the mundane. We have to sanctify ourselves throughout the entire day and never ignore our relationship with our fellowman.

Much is taken for granted in the world of commerce. Society makes constant demands on our financial resources and, regrettably, people resort to various approaches towards earning the almighty dollar. Most of the time these approaches are scrupulous. What happens when we are up against the wall? Are we as careful with someone else’s money as we are with our own? Are we

as concerned about someone else's feelings as we are with our own? Do we ever take advantage of another person who is not as financially astute or as aggressive as we are? I am not even talking about the government.

Moshe *Rabbeinu* laments, "You will do evil in G-d's eyes and provoke Him through the work of your hands." This does not only mean that we will do things wrong to provoke Hashem with our hands. It may also mean that our "hand," the handshake, the word we give someone, will no longer have any value or meaning. A word is no longer a word; a commitment no longer carries any weight.

The *Navi* exhorts us to *Kechu imachem devarim v'shuvu el Hashem*

– "Take with yourselves words and return to Hashem." Stick to your resolutions; translate them into practice. As the New Year begins, we make resolutions and commitments. Some last until *Succos*. We give our word, but does it really mean anything? Take the words with you. Make them a part of your life, and, hopefully, your life will change.