

RABBI JACK'S MESSAGE IN A MINUTE



There is a Hebrew word that is ubiquitous at this time of year: *t'shuvah*. We see it often in our High Holiday prayer books, it is written about it in articles and commentaries, and it will be talked about in sermons across the globe. Generally, and most commonly it is translated as *repentance*. But more accurately, and based on its root meaning, it is better defined as *to return*.

Nitzavim, this week's Torah reading, which always occurs right before Rosh Hashanah, is referred to as *parshat t'shuvah*- the portion of return. Moses is very near the end of his life, and continues his fervent litany of reminders, chastisements, advice, and prophecies--because he knows his nation's entry into the Land of Promise is imminent. He predicts that the people will worship false idols, go astray, not follow the principles and ideals of our faith and therefore will ultimately encounter conquest and exile.

However, Moses, most significantly, tells the assembled that the future also holds a glorious time when they will, "*return to the Lord with their heart and soul...and then the Almighty will bring you back from wherever you have been dispersed...and you will return to the land.* (Deut.30:2-3) The key word of course employed in this part of Moses' speech is *t'shuvah-to return, to come back*.

I am attracted to this deeper understanding of the concept of forgiveness and atonement. Our sins and transgressions are seen as going to a place we should not have gone and we can achieve repentance by circling back to a location we have been before. That is to say our natural state is one of goodness, our innate makeup is in tune with righteousness, justice, and love. Regardless of how far afield we have meandered away, according to our most sacred tradition, we have the capacity to always find our way back, to our original station of correct behavior and youthful innocence. We start with a sincere desire to *return* to a lifestyle where we choose right over wrong, and hopefully we do so in the words of Moses with our *heart and soul* by continuing on a path that leads to charity, kindness, compassion and generosity of spirit. The Days of Awe represent our first steps in this journey home, and if we reach that destination, we will have truly attained *t'shuvah*.

Chag Sameach,
Rabbi Jack

May each of us have a sweet and healthy New Year and be inscribed and sealed in the Book of Life.

P.S. Please join me and Cantor Lisa this Friday night at 7:30 for the last Shabbat service before the High Holy Days!