

Message: Shabbat Shuva: שבת שובה Home Sweet Home

שַׁבַּת שְׁלוֹם חֲבֵרַי

Shabbat shalom, khaverai.

Shabbat shalom, my friends.

Today is known as Shabbat Shuva, the Sabbath of return. This is the name that has developed for the shabbat that falls during the 10 Days of Awe, the yamim nora'im ימים נוראים, which are the high holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and the days in between.

Our core scripture today is from Yeshayahu, Isaiah.

For Adonai is our judge, Adonai is our lawgiver, Adonai is our king. He will save us.

Isaiah 33:22 (CJB)

One way to think of ha yamim nora'im is like a court case. This isn't a trial by jury though. No, I think of 'life' as a jury trial. Throughout your life it seems that everyone gets to be your juror, gets to state their opinion, and feels it's their right to judge you. No. This is more of a bench trial where the judge listens to the case, weighs all the evidence, and passes judgement.

On the first day you stand before the judge and the opening arguments are read. The evidence is presented. The judge gives you the next 8 days to address the charges, and the next day, which is the 10th day of the trial, you again stand before the judge. He weighs all of the accusations and evidence, taking into account all of the things you did to correct or address the charges. He then rules on the case.

On Rosh Hashanah we stand before the King, the book of life and the books of account are opened (as they are described in Revelation). On Yom Kippur the final ruling is made, and we are held accountable for all of what we did or did not do. The time in between is when we have one last opportunity to make amends.

At least, this is how we are able to approach the yamim nora'im in the olam hazeh or in this life. In the olam haba'a or in death, we no longer have an opportunity to do anything about anything. Our time for doing is over. However, in life, this season is a time of repentance and restitution.

Shabbat Shuva, the sabbath of return, falls during this time of repentance and restitution. This is a time of return to a life of living in the way of the King.

*For Adonai is our judge, Adonai is our lawgiver,
Adonai is our king. He will save us.*

Isaiah 33:22 (CJB)

T'shuvah תשובה

The gospel of Yeshua, as we have heard many times, is:

...“Turn from your sins to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near!”

Matthew 4:17 (CJB)

{comment original Hebrew gospel of Matthew?}

The Hebrew for this phrase 'turn from your sins to God' is:

חֲזְרוּ בְּתִשְׁבָּה

A direct translation of this Hebrew would be 'return (khizru) in (b) repentance (t'shuvah)'.

Today I want to focus on the first step of the good news according to Yeshua. I want to focus on t'shuvah. Sin separates us from both God and others, so genuine t'shuvah requires more than simply saying “I’m sorry.”

The Hebrew word for repentance is t'shuvah תשובה which means to return. It is also the word used for an answer or a response. That is because t'shuvah should be our answer, our response, to standing in Adonai's presence and being made aware of our sin. T'shuvah is the multi-stepped process of repairing the damage we have done in the world when we have walked in the ways that seem right to us and not in the ways of the Lord.

Other ways may seem right to you, but they are not the way of the Lord. These ways only lead to death.

In Judaism today, a person who returns to a life of Torah observance is called a ba'al t'shuvah, a master of repentance. The name is derived from a Talmudic passage that says that the master of repentance stands at a level where even the righteous cannot stand. This is interpreted to mean that someone who chose a righteous life is even holier than someone who had not known another Master. The ba'al t'shuvah movement was a major movement that kicked off in the 60's, a sort of Orthodox revival, that paralleled the Yeshua movement. In Israel the terms (חֹזֵר בְּשֵׂאלָה) chozer bi-she'elah, which means 'returning to the question' and (חֹזֵר בְּתַשׁוּבָה) khozer b'tshuvah, which means 'returning to repentance', are the common ways to refer to someone who returns to Torah observance.

I hope you are tying this together along with me. Khozer and Khizru (different forms of the same word) b'tshuvah. Linguistically, we begin to see that this notion of a return to repentance and walking in the ways of the Lord as *Yeshua said* is essential to living in the kingdom of God.

חֲזְרוּ בְּתַשׁוּבָה, כִּי קִרְבָּה מַלְכוּת שָׁמַיִם.

Matthew 4:17 (HNT)

Return in repentance to the kingdom of God.

In Chasidic and Orthodox traditions, the Rabbis have identified 5 levels of t'shuvah corresponding to the 5 levels of the soul. By itself, this would be an interesting and amazing study. The first four levels are physical, emotional, intellectual, and existential, and the 5th level is to be alone with Hashem. It all leads up to a relationship with Hashem.

That's not where we are taking this today. Instead, I want to keep this practical, and I want to talk about the 4 steps of t'shuvah.

What is Sin?

To understand the t'shuvah properly, we first need to understand sin. What is sin?

Torah is the only thing that defines sin. Torah defines what we should and should not do. It is the target we aim for, and sin is missing the mark defined by Torah.

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Torah or the Prophets! I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. Amen, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the

smallest letter or serif shall ever pass away from the Torah until all things come to pass. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever keeps and teaches them, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees and Torah scholars, you shall never enter the kingdom of heaven!

Matthew 5:17–20 (TLV)

Some people teach that this means that Yeshua didn't come to cancel the Torah, but, oops, He did. That's not what it says. The words he uses there for abolish and fulfill are:

Destroy= (katalyō) kat-al-oo'-o (לְבַטֵּל) Le-vatel. Le-kayem - cancel

Make full or fulfill= (plēroō) play-rah'-o (לְקַיֵּם) Le-kayem - uphold

If your teachers justify the cancellation of Torah, Yeshua here calls them the least in the kingdom of heaven. If your theology justifies the cancellation of Torah, It is not a theology Yeshua supports. Yeshua taught us how we should live according to the Torah. He upheld it. He made it full.

Torah defines sin. Sin is missing the mark.

Two Types of Sin

There are two major categories of sin corresponding to the two greatest commandments.

He told him, “ ‘You are to love Adonai your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.’ This is the greatest and most important mitzvah. And a second is similar to it, ‘You are to love your neighbor as yourself.’ All of the Torah and the Prophets are dependent on these two mitzvot.”

Matthew 22:37–40 (CJB)

The two greatest commandments are:

- Love Adonai with all your heart, mind, and soul
- Love your neighbor as yourself

So the two major categories of sin corresponding to these two commandments are sin against Adonai and sin against your neighbor. Many of the sins against your neighbor are also sins against Adonai, but not all sins against Adonai are sins against your neighbor.

Each of these major categories of sin can also be divided into intentional and unintentional sins.

The point of t'shuvah is to return to relationship.

Sin separates us from God. Sin separates us from each other. T'shuva returns us to the relationships that we are supposed to have.

So, if our sins can be committed against both man and Adonai, then our t'shuvah must be made to both man and Adonai.

This is where it gets tricky, and we will look at this more in a few minutes.

Steps of T'shuvah

Like I said earlier, I want to talk about the 4 steps of t'shuvah. Teachers like making lists. There is no 4 step plan in scripture, so this is my own amalgamation of the many lists of steps and many examples in scripture.

I'm going to throw in one bonus step here before I get started and that is simply this. You have to recognize that Adonai is our judge, Adonai is our lawgiver, and Adonai is our king. You have to believe He will save us. If you don't believe and live according to that principle, then what are you returning to? You may be able to make t'shuvah with your neighbor, but you will not be able to make t'shuvah to Adonai if He is not the King of your life.

On to the list.

- Step 1: Regret
- Step 2: Stop
- Step 3: Verbalize and Compensate
- Step 4: Make a Plan

Step 1: Regret

Biblically, repentance is not saying, "I'm sorry".

A common way to say 'sorry' in Hebrew is (אני מצטער). Mitzta'er is not repentance. Another word is sliखा (סליחה) which also means forgiveness.

You have to recognize the damage that you have caused. Evaluate the negative impact this action may have had on yourself or on others.

The commandments of God can be described as 613 opportunities to demonstrate our love for Him. When we go against the will of God and do not obey his mitzvot, the feeling we are supposed to have is regret. What a lost opportunity to honor and serve the King.

You have to be able to recognize what you did and how you injured your neighbor. You must be remorseful for your actions.

If you don't regret what you have done and recognize the damage you've done, you are not actually 'sorry' at all. You are not repentant. You are not remorseful.

Saying that you are sorry is not t'shuvah, but being sorry, that expression of remorse or regret, is a part of repentance. It does nothing to repair any damage you caused. It does nothing to commit you to a different way of living. It does nothing to return you to right standing with Adonai or your neighbor. It is just the first step.

Step 2: Stop

The second step is simply to stop. This is pretty obvious, but insanely difficult for most of us. Stop willfully sinning. Stop unintentionally sinning. Stop.

You must recognize and discontinue the improper action.

Stop the behaviors that lead to unintentional sins. If you keep participating in lashon hara, stop speaking to people about other people and stop listening to people speaking about other people. By just doing that, you avoid all of the sins related to the tongue.

Stay away from all of the paths that lead to sin. This includes crafting your environment to prevent temptation. And it means staying away from even mere thoughts, which can lead to acting on those thoughts.

Step 3: Repair

You need to confess what you have done and your regret of those actions to the person you have wronged. Verbally confess the action, thus giving the action a concrete form in your own mind.

We don't just sin against God, do we? We sin against others. We don't love our neighbor as ourselves. What is hateful to us, we do to our neighbor. We must humble ourselves and place ourselves in a position where we are asking for their mercy, their grace. We also have to pay for what we have done. That is, we must make restitution for what we have cost the other person.

Now, when we have sinned against God, what can we do to compensate God for our sin? The Torah prescribes many things: prayer, sacrifice, charity, etc. However, we have something even greater. We have the atoning work of Yeshua. Thank God for Yeshua, right? He has made atonement for our sins against God.

He is the atonement for our sins, and not only for our sins but also for the whole world.

1 John 2:2 (TLV)

However, when we have sinned against others, we must make restitution for what we have done. That is Biblical. That is God's plan, and, without that, we cannot completely return. We must try to repair the damage we have done. We cannot leave the gaping hole in another's life and then leave and walk away. Without restitution, we cannot be forgiven.

Step 4: Plan

Be purposeful. Determine never to repeat the action. Picture a better way to handle it.

Make a plan to avoid making the same mistakes again. Most Rabbis place charity, tzedakah צדקה, in this step. It's really difficult to do wrong when we are busy doing right. When you are faced with same situation or temptation again and you choose not to sin, then you have truly returned.

Forgiveness

T'shuvah leads to forgiveness. The point of t'shuvah is to return to relationship. Sin separates us from God. Sin separates us from each other. When we go through the steps of t'shuva, this returns us to a right standing with God and with our neighbor. It gives us the opportunity to enjoy the relationships that we are supposed to have as long as we are willing to forgive as we have been forgiven.

Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted; and forgive each other, just as in the Messiah God has also forgiven you.

Ephesians 4:32 (CJB)

This is the importance of t'shuvah. Are our sins forgiven before we repent or after? Yeshua did the work of atonement, and God in Messiah is always ready to forgive. However, people have to repent to be forgiven. We can get rid of all bitterness and rage and anger and quarreling and slander, along with all malice. We can be kind to one another and compassionate. We also have to repent in order to be forgiven because that is how we are forgiven by Adonai.

If we acknowledge our sins, then, since he is trustworthy and just, he will forgive them and purify us from all wrongdoing.

1 John 1:9 (CJB)

So once we have done all of the work of t'shuvah, what response should we expect? We should be able to expect forgiveness.

We place our faith in Yeshua. He demonstrated for us what it is to live a life of perfect obedience. He taught us how obey the commandments of the Lord. His death and resurrection atone for our sins. Our faithfulness is demonstrated by living our lives like Yeshua taught us to live.

The most important part is repentance. Without a repentant heart, we can not be forgiven by God.

I would like to conclude this teaching today with our key verse for today.

*For Adonai is our judge, Adonai is our lawgiver,
Adonai is our king. He will save us.*

Isaiah 33:22 (CJB)

Sin damages both our relationship with Adonai and our relationships with people, genuine repentance must address both. Yeshua's message, "Turn from your sins to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near," reflects the Hebrew concept of t'shuvah. Repentance is more than simply saying, "I'm sorry." It means turning back to God and restoring our relationships with others.

1For we know that if the tent, our earthly home, is torn down, we have a building from God—a home not made with human hands, eternal in the heavens.

2 Corinthians 5:1 (TLV)

Rav Sha'ul refers to being in the presence of the King as being home with Him. Sin separates us from Adonai, but repentance resulting in forgiveness returns us home.

9So whether at home or absent, we make it our aim to be pleasing to Him. 10For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Messiah, so that each one may receive what is due for the things he did while in the body—whether good or bad.

2 Co 5:9–10 (TLV)

Ultimately, *t'shuvah* leads us toward forgiveness, restoration, and renewed relationships. T'shuvah brings us home. Believers are called to place their faith in Yeshua, whose obedience, death, and resurrection provide atonement, and to demonstrate that faith by living according to His teachings. Repentance is therefore not merely an expression of sorrow; it is a genuine return to right relationship with Adonai and with one another.

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