

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Friday, October 09, 2009

Reflections on Hoshana Rabba - Did We Measure Up on our Teshuva

Hoshana Rabba is a serious day of reflection, the final opening to avert a severe decree. Have we or have we not lived up to our teshuva from Elul through Yom Kippur? Have we taken steps to implement it?

In a nutshell, teshuva is drawing closer – in whatever areas we may have grown more distant from the Creator, teshuva means to draw closer. Drawing closer means to emulate the Creator's middos, to properly keep the mitzvahs which are His Will, and to recognize that Hashem Echad – that He Alone is the only power in this world and nothing except His Will is done, and that all that He does is for our spiritual growth and development.

On Rosh Hashana we crown Hashem King. Most of the time, we are involved with our needs, our work, our families, our projects, our feelings, and more. That is the nature of this world. When we reflect and remember the basic truth that Hashem is the King, we are reaching for absolute truth – no matter what our efforts, we need *siyata d'shmaya* and only if it is good in Hashem's eyes from Hashem's perspective will we be granted success.

As adults, we have come to a point of independence where we want to make sure that we are self-determining as much as possible – we take total responsibility for our actions, our speech and our thoughts, the venues over which we have control. The additional adult responsibility that Jewish people take, in order to live the ethics and *chochma* given in Torah, includes remembering that Hashem is King and that Hashem Echad.

What does that look like?

Two different people shared some examples:

Love Hashem and give Love Like Hashem - *Ahavas Yisrael*

“We had visitors for Chol HaMoed – relatives who live out of town who are not observant (Conservative). We were able to withstand in a friendly manner their probing and challenging (isn't this a bit antiquated? Are you living in the Dark Ages – it is 2009) to our practices because we understood that they are *b'tzelem elokim* (souls created by Hashem) and we were focusing on *ahavas yisrael* (Loving your fellow Jew – respecting every Jew, acknowledging belief in Hashem.) While we tried to give some explanation without being defensive, we were successful in changing the subject simply by letting them know we respect their wisdom but are not able to convey to them in a discussion format all that would be needed for us to have a meeting of the minds. We invited them to learn more about it with us at another time if they would like to, but for now, to change the subject. This worked, we felt, because we conveyed our love and respect for them without accidentally insulting them.”

Emes - Hashem is the Only Power

“I often have to fight off fearful thoughts. I made a resolution to remember that Hashem only sends good but here I was, falling again into the clutches of worrying about what action someone might take or how something might be misinterpreted and what kind of a lashing I would be subjected to – what would happen to

ME? It was Hoshana Rabba, and I wanted to have only unity in mind, beseeching Hashem to cancel all negative decrees against our people and bring the Mashiach. Instead, or maybe as a test to see if I truly have incorporated into my being the concept that Hashem is the only power, something stirred up my toughest set of negative fears and there I was, headed into the mire of condemning, hating, resenting and worse.

I spoke out to Hashem and said I want the Mashiach more than anything and this is all in Your hands. I trust that whatever happens is for my ultimate good and please on that basis reduce my suffering from these fearful thoughts – and before I could even finish pleading with Hashem to remove the suffering I felt at peace.

Hashem is the only power there is. By recognizing that my indulging the negative thinking was because I was hurt and angry, I was able to stop and remember Hashem is the only power and only does tov. Now that I see how easily my feelings shifted, I realize that the suffering from the negative thinking is self-inflicted and unnecessary, I immediately davened to Hashem to ask that He count my being able to shift my mood as a merit for Klal Yisroel and that He cancel all negative decrees against the Jewish people and bring Mashiach. Upon reflection, my concern for what would happen to me seemed so real and worth worrying about. I wonder why I don't have the same sense of importance to what I was successful in doing – in shifting my mood – because we learn that these things DO have a huge impact on the spiritual realms. I like the idea of ascribing the same type of satisfaction that previously was invested in indulging the negative thinking to the simple shift to a positive mood and will build my neder to bring full heart into feeling satisfaction with “Hashem is the only power.” To do so, I must remember that my soul will continue after my body leaves this world and to include as a primary factor in my decision what will generate connection and growth for my eternal soul whenever considering action.”