

Shabbos Shuva

The *Shabbos* between *Rosh HaShana* and *Yom Kippur* is referred to as “*Shabbos Shuva*” since we read the *haftora* from the *navi Hoshea* which opens with the verse, “*Shuva Yisrael* - Return Israel.” The prophet is speaking to the Jews remaining in *Eretz Yisrael* after the exile of the Ten Tribes. He is telling them to repent and avert the impending disaster of the destruction of the first *Bais HaMikdash* and the end of the First Commonwealth.

The full sentence is, “Return, *Yisrael*, up to *Hashem* your G-D since you have stumbled in your sins.” The *Gemara* takes note of the words “up to” and teaches us that *teshuva*, repentance, is so powerful that it reaches all the way to *Hashem’s* heavenly throne. It breaks through all of the barriers which we have erected through our misdeeds and reconnects us to the source, to *Hashem*. The next words are, “Take these words with you and return toward *Hashem*; say to him bear our inequity and accept that which is good in us.” The question is asked - why does this verse say that our repentance is only toward *Hashem* and not all the way up to him?

Dr. Mendel Hirsch (1833-1900, educator and commentator) in his commentary to the *haftoros* explains that there are many gradations to repentance. (See also *Rambam Hilchos Teshuva* 2:1 and 2:2.) The first verse tells us about the great gift of *teshuva*; it can restore us to a pristine state in which we are “right up” to *Hashem*. The second verse teaches us to begin no matter how alienated we feel we are from *Hashem*. We should begin our journey toward *Hashem* through *teshuva* even if we don’t think we can achieve complete and total repentance.

Perhaps this is the message of, *לדוד ד' אורי וישעי*, - *Hashem* you are my light and salvation - (a psalm composed by *Dovid*). We recite this psalm throughout the *Yamim Noraim*, the Days of Awe, because this opening verse refers to *Rosh HaShana* and *Yom Kippur*. Our sages teach us that *Hashem* is our beacon on *Rosh HaShana* and our salvation on *Yom Kippur*. We home in on the beacon on *Rosh HaShana* and hope to arrive all the way to *Hashem’s* throne during the ten days of repentance. By *Yom Kippur*, we rely on *Hashem* to be our life line even if we haven’t succeeded to change ourselves completely for He will accept us back and cleanse us of our sins.

It remains up to us to make these days of introspections meaningful and productive. We need to change ourselves by aligning our behavior with the spirit of these hallowed days. If we give it our full effort, *Hashem* will bless us with a complete restoration of our relationship with Him which is the true success and happiness for the *Torah* Jew.