

Tsheuvah: Return

As I write these words, Shelley and I are awaiting the birth of our child. Oftentimes during these days, I find myself thinking and daydreaming about this precious little one. This new life has already touched my life with wonder and thanksgiving.

As I prepare myself to father our child, I revisit the child within me. I look at the world through fresh eyes, all of my senses alive. My heart dances to the beauty all around me. My soul embraces the day like an intrepid adventurer setting forth on an exciting journey. In these moments, I taste, smell and breathe the deep blessing that is life.

At other moments, a different mood prevails. I experience a subtle, background sadness during these days. For I know that I am not as fully alive as I once was, and still could be. The woundings and losses of a life's journey have taken their toll. I have learned to protect my heart and to temper my dreams. This loss of innocence is not bad. This is a path we all travel. Wisdom and balance come with the years. And yet... I still yearn for the openness, responsiveness, joy and excitement that were, once upon a time, more common companions along this life journey.

This experience, awaiting the birth of a child, sheds light on the Holy Day season in which we will all soon share. These Holy Days are an opportunity, an invitation, to do *tsheuvah*, repentance. Normally we think of *tsheuvah* in negative terms, in terms of turning away from some past wrongdoing. Few of us get really excited about this kind of *tsheuvah*. Most of us are pretty decent people. We are rarely intentionally mean or hurtful. And our unintentional moments of anger or pettiness are so deeply ingrained in us, we have little real hope that we will be truly different in the New Year.

And yet, our tradition holds out to us a more positive and inspiring understanding. *Tsheuvah* is a reclaiming of ourselves, of our potential to live and love, fully and joyfully. As adults, most of us have grown well accustomed to our shortcomings. We have accepted patterns of behavior which limit our presence to life and which inhibit the love and blessings we can give to and receive from others. "This is who I am. Leave me alone", a familiar internal voice may say.

Not true, our tradition says. *Tsheuvah* is possible. Moving through those barriers, opening up stuck places, reclaiming the fullness of our hearts and souls, are all possible. The Rabbis teach that God created *tsheuvah* before the first day of Creation. That is to say that the apparent laws of nature do not limit the process of *tsheuvah*, the deep reclaiming of our best selves. The apparently impossible can be. That is the teaching of our faith.

These Holy Days are a deep call, a deep call to our souls. But they are only a call, only an invitation, only the beginning. *Tsheuvah* means inner work--daily, devoted inner work. Our self-limiting habits are all well ingrained in our personalities. We change negative habits and open stuck places only with repeated practice.

The Holy Days are meant to be a spiritual high place, a mountaintop from which we can glimpse the possible. Hopefully, that mountain top vision of the possible will grip us with enough power that we will say; I want that in my life. I am willing to do the hard inner work throughout the year that will bring me closer to that place.

As Shelley and I await our little blessing, I stand at a high place in my life. I see ever so clearly that this new life is truly a creation of God's love. I see that we are all created to be vessels of God's love. I pray that these Holy Days will take you to your personal mountaintop and give you a clear and powerful vista. And I pray that that vista will strengthen and inspire you to do your tsheuvah throughout the year.

L'Shana Tova U, Metukah.

Blessings for a Good and Sweet New Year